SHADOWRUN 7320™

HARLEQUIN'S BACK

FASA CORPORATION

EDITED BY TOM DOWD

HARLEQUIN'S BACK™

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VOICES FROM THE PAST

Harlequin sat alone in a quiet room lit only by the sinking flames of a dying fire. He wore a long, simply cut robe shot through with gold and burgundy threads, and he had left his face unpainted. The firelight sparkled off the metallic threads in Harlequin's robe and the intricate metal filigree on the walls behind him. Harlequin stared at the drink in his hand, oblivious to all else around him.

The liquor swirled in the glass, impelled by the gentle movement of his wrist. He watched the magical blending of color as it hovered on the edge of solidity, staying liquid only because of the energy imparted by his hand. He reversed the direction of the liquor's motion, and its colors changed dramatically. Reflected firelight danced along the edges of the brimming crystal goblet.

Harlequin felt tired, worn by the passing of time and emotions and the changes through which the world pulled itself. For the first time in almost as long as he could remember, he lacked a cause or a direction. The time for such things was past, banished with the quick snap of a fine-edged blade. Trivial, he knew—pointless and inconsequential—and now done.

Sighing, Harlequin sipped from the goblet and let the drink's deep fire burn through him. He nearly laughed at the pleasure of it until—as always—the cold aftertaste caught him by surprise.

"How far you have fallen," said a long-dead voice behind him.

Slowly, Harlequin turned from the fire and looked across the room's long expanse. At its center, crisscrossed by shadows cast by the dancing firelight, stood a figure in a black robe. The cloth was torn, covered with the dust of a thousand roads. Dark, gnarled hands hung limply from the sleeves, but no face showed within the raised hood. In its place, Harlequin saw only churning smoke.

The elf raised an eyebrow, snorted once, and raised his drink to his lips. "Oh, please," he muttered.

"You cannot ignore me," said the robed figure, its icy voice underlaid with a howling wind.

Harlequin snorted again, spraying a few drops of liquid from his mouth. "I can do as I please," he said. He drank again, this time more deeply.

"You are drunk."

Harlequin laughed. "And you, sir, are a feeble attempt to frighten me with an image so common that it would not frighten a child." He gazed into the heart of the fire. "Lewis Carroll must be spinning in his grave."

"Indeed he must," agreed the figure. "You are not only drunk, but confused. *A Christmas Carol* was written by Charles Dickens, not Carroll. You fog your mind so that you cannot see the truth."

Abruptly, Harlequin stood and hurled the glass toward the robed figure. The missile fell just short of its target, exploding into fragments of brilliant crystal and a spray of liquid color. The specter did not move.

"Begone, foul spirit," Harlequin cried. "I summoned you not into my home and I banish you hence." He flung his hand toward the robed figure, spreading his fingers as if throwing dust. A hint of power danced between his fingertips.

"You cannot banish me," said the dark figure, unmoving.

Harlequin's face grew wild. "*I can and I do!*" he shouted, thrusting his arms out to his sides. "*M'aela j-taarm querm talar!*"

The room darkened suddenly. Pockets of moisture sealed in the blazing firewood burst open, throwing showers of sparks into the air. They rained down on Harlequin, ignored until a cool wind rushed back at him and damped them into embers. He brushed the char from his shoulders.

The black robe still had not moved. "It has been a long time since those words were last spoken, *Har'lea'quinn*. And this is not the first time you have used them against me." The figure's robe rustled slightly. "They did not aid you then, either."

Harlequin paled. "No ...," he breathed, stumbling back to his chair. "You are gone ... forgotten ... "

"Forgotten, perhaps, but never gone. How can we ever be truly gone?"

Harlequin turned away, shielding his eyes with his forearm. "You are the past. Your place is there," he moaned. "That world is gone."

"Perhaps," replied the figure, "but as long as you remember ... "

"Yes. That is the key, isn't it?" Harlequin said, lowering his arm. He faced the robed figure. "My mind. You are right, whatever you are. I am drunk, and that is a bad state for one like me."

"Then I am a figment of your imagination?"

Harlequin shrugged. "Were you ever anything more?"

The robe moved as if the figure laughed, but Harlequin heard no sound. "That borders on blasphemy. Once, you were more devout."

"Never for you."

"I understood you too well."

Harlequin thrust his shaking hands into the pockets of his robe. "Or vice versa."

The figure bowed slightly. "Perhaps. Madness can bring wisdom."

Harlequin sneered. "You are the Master of the Twisted Path. The only wisdom you teach is avoidance."

"And yet I am here."

"*Alamestra*," said Harlequin, pointing to the now-motionless, solid globs of color around the figure's feet, "is not an indulgence known for gifting wisdom."

"Then what of me?"

"What of you?" replied Harlequin.

"If I exist only as a creature of your mind, why am I here?"

Harlequin shrugged. "It matters not. Your words are lies and your deeds treachery. Your inspiration is betrayal. I care not why you are here and will not listen to you."

"And yet you say you summoned me."

"I am—*was*—drunk."

"If I am of no consequence or concern, why did your dispelling fail?"

Harlequin stared at him.

"You have cleared your mind. The fog is lifted, yet I remain."

"You are a hangover incarnate, nothing more."

The figure shifted again. "You lie to yourself."

"No," said Harlequin, "you lie to me."

"As I said."

Harlequin tensed. "This is foolishness. You are a shadow of the dead past conjured by my drunken mind to vex me."

"Why me?"

"I do not care," Harlequin snapped, turning back to the dying fire.

"You lie to yourself."

"You repeat yourself, bland spirit."

Slowly, the figure raised one arm and pointed at Harlequin. "I am Deceit. I am Deception. I am Treachery. I am Betrayal. I am the passions that lead men to lie to others and themselves."

Harlequin turned and stared, his eyes growing wider. "As you say," he said.

"As you do, now."

"Your words can never be believed," said Harlequin.

"I am not words, *Har'lea'quinn.* I am emotion, I am passion, I *am* what you feel."

Harlequin fell silent.

"And you feel them, do you not?"

"I feel nothing."

"You can taste them in the air."

"I taste nothing."

"Smell them on the wind."

"The air is still."

"Hear them laughing in the silence, calling for their due."

"I hear only your maddening voice."

The figure lowered its arm. "You lie to yourself."

Suddenly, Harlequin strode toward the figure. "*I do not!*" he howled, his hands held before him and clenched into sweaty fists. He shook them at the robed figure. "It is too soon!"

"They are coming."

Harlequin spun away, then rounded back on his antagonist. "It is too soon! They cannot be coming!"

"You deceive yourself."

"It is you who deceives me!"

"As I have said."

His shoulders slumping, Harlequin stumbled back toward the fire. "It is too soon ...," he mumbled. "Nothing is right ... I cannot understand. ... "

"You do not wish to understand. The humans play with things they do not comprehend because no one teaches them."

Harlequin whirled back to face the figure. "And telling them would stop them? I think not."

The figure shifted. "The humans have danced their little dance, *Har'lea'quinn.* They shook this world, and the others. Now they pay the price."

Harlequin grasped his head and shook it. "No ... it is too *soon.* ...

"You will still be saying that when they tear the fingers from your hands and blind you with them. Have you fallen so far, *Har'lea'quinn*? Have you forgotten the horror?"

"I can't ... "

"Nor can I." The figure stared at Harlequin. "I expected more from the last Knight of the Crying Spire."

Harlequin stared back at the figure. "The Northern Islands are *gone.* Forgotten dust of a forgotten world."

"As all shall be, *Har'lea'quinn,* as all shall be."

"*What would you have me do?*" Harlequin cried.

"Destroy the bridge."

Harlequin blanched. "That cannot be done ... How ... "

"Thayla's Voice."

Harlequin sat abruptly. "*No.*"

"You know where she roams. Her song will prevent them from crossing. They cannot pass her."

Harlequin stared into the darkness and slowly nodded. "*Yes* ... "

"Travel lightly. Their allies already wander the netherworlds. It will not be safe. They will smell you coming."

"I understand."

The figure walked past Harlequin toward the dying embers of the fire. "Move quickly, Laughing Man; they have built their bridge before."

Harlequin stared silently into the shadows, still nodding.

Shaking its head, the figure stepped into the fire. The embers flared and kindled, but no heat warmed Harlequin. At last he looked up, saw the growing shadow of his chair on the wall, and turned in time to see the last swirls of burning cloth as the heat from the now-raging fire spun them higher and higher.

He stared at the fire, then turned swiftly as the large, ornate doors at the far end of the room burst open. A young woman entered, her long white hair falling in waves over the black satin dressing gown she clutched to her body with one hand. The other hand held a heavy-barreled chrome pistol. "Did you ..., " she stammered. "I felt ... "

Harlequin stood and walked toward her. "Indeed you did. Prepare yourself; it is time to see how much you have learned."

She stared at him. As he moved past her he turned and continued walking, backward.

"The netherworlds ... " He paused, and smiled. "Pardon my anachronism. The *metaplanes* will ring with the sounds of battle and songs long unsung." He walked backward out of the room and down the hall.

She followed quickly. "I don't ... What happened?"

Harlequin grinned broadly. "Times have changed." His path arced across the large hall they had entered. He began ascending the staircase, still facing her.

She stopped at its foot and yelled up after him. "Will you tell me what the frag is going on?"

"Why, my dear," he said, finally turning away from her, "Harlequin's back. Can't you tell?"

INTRODUCTION

Harlequin's Back is a multipart roleplaying adventure set in the Awakened world of **Shadowrun.**

The year is 2055. Advances in technology are astonishing, with humans able to blend with computers and travel through that electronic netherworld of data known as the Matrix. Even more astonishing is the return of magic. Elves, dwarfs, dragons, orks, and trolls have reassumed their true forms, while megacorporations (rather than superpowers) rule much of the world. Moving through this world like hushed whispers in the night are the shadowrunners. No one admits their existence, but no one else can do their secret work.

The world of 2055 has another dimension, one that few of its denizens experience. Many people in many times have named this insubstantial realm of perpetual variance and ordered chaos many things. The mystical practitioners of the Sixth World call this dimension the *metaplanes*, and the adventures of **Harlequin's Back** take place in that dimension. Welcome to Harlequin's astral quest, chummers.

GAMEMASTERING NOTES

Harlequin's Back is unlike any other **Shadowrun** adventure published to date, even though it contains many similar elements. The five short adventures that make up this story line all take place in the metaplanes as part of an enormous and bizarre astral quest. Though the players serve as the protagonists of each adventure, the overall astral quest is in many ways Harlequin's journey. For additional information on this aspect of **Harlequin's Back,** see the **Plot Synopsis** and **Running Harlequin,** pages 10 and 11 in this section.

The following definitions of specific terms used in this adventure should make the various elements of **Harlequin's Back** easier to follow. The **story** refers to the underlying themes and background information of **Harlequin's Back** that provide a frame of reference through which the players and gamemaster can view and understand the events presented. **Adventure** refers to the events that take place in each part of the astral quest (**Aftermath, A Fistful of Karma,** and so on) that describe the goals, opposition, and possible actions of the player characters. These are simply shorter versions of standard **Shadowrun** adventures. The sections within each adventure are referred to as **chapters,** and are comparable to the sections of standard **Shadowrun** adventures. The term **section** is used in the normal fashion, to refer to the parts of each "chapter" such as **Tell It to Them Straight, Hooks,** and so on.

The adventures of **Harlequin's Back** combine decision-tree and linear story formats. For each adventure, the player characters may arrive at different locations in the story via different paths, or follow one event in the story directly into the next. In order to pack maximum plot and peril into **Harlequin's Back**, the adventures frequently contain plot lines that are more linear than the usual **Shadowrun** adventures. The gamemaster should think of each adventure as the bare-bones plot and should feel free to make any changes necessary to flesh it out and give his players more choices. To aid the gamemaster in this task, the individual chapters of each adventure include suggestions for gamemastering the various situations that may arise.

To run **Harlequin's Back,** the gamemaster needs a thorough familiarity with the material in this book, as well as a working knowledge of the **Shadowrun, Second Edition (SRII)**, rules. The gamemaster should also be familiar with the expanded magic rules in the **Grimoire, Second Edition (Grimoire II)**. Aside from the **Player Handouts** in the back of the book, all the information presented in **Harlequin's Back** is for the gamemaster's eyes only.

This adventure is a sequel to the original **Harlequin** adventure released in 1990, and so gamemasters and players may find knowledge of that adventure useful, though not absolutely necessary. If a player group has not experienced **Harlequin,** the gamemaster must make certain minor adjustments to some sequences and scenes in **Harlequin's Back.** Specifically, the gamemaster must figure out how the player characters would recognize Harlequin and Jane Foster or create a characteristic way for that duo to introduce themselves. In addition, the gamemaster must massage the text where necessary to reflect Jane Foster's presence or absence in any given part of the story.

Harlequin's Back is designed for a team of four to six shadowrunners with a wide variety of talent. The team should include at least one female player character and one or more mages or shamans. The gamemaster should not reveal the exotic, magic-rich nature of this astral-quest adventure to players ahead of time and should not allow the nature of the adventure to affect players' decisions regarding which characters to play. **Harlequin's Back** offers plenty of challenge even to such technologically oriented characters as deckers, riggers, and those with heavy cyberware, as their equipment changes or even vanishes in accordance with the demands of astral space. Coping with such changes and finding ways to use other skills effectively should keep these players interested.

SHADOWRUN RULES

Harlequin's Back uses the **Shadowrun, Second Edition (SRII),** rules, as well as the expanded magic rules in the **Grimoire, Second Edition (Grimoire II).** All specific informa-

tion, particularly game statistics, appears in **SRII** format. Gamemasters still using the first-edition **Shadowrun** rules (shame on you!) will need to make a few adjustments to non-player character, weapon, and spell statistics.

MAKING SUCCESS TESTS

During the course of **Harlequin's Back**, the players will make a number of Success Tests using a skill and a given target number. These Success Tests are indicated by the name of the skill, followed by the target number in parentheses. For example, a Sorcery (5) Test refers to a Sorcery Success Test against a Target Number of 5.

SUCCESS TABLES

At times, the gamemaster will use success tables to determine how much information the players receive from inquiries and investigations. Each success table lists different information obtained for differing numbers of die roll successes. Rolling a higher number of successes always reveals the information for the lower numbers of successes as well. For example, a character rolling three successes would learn the information for three successes, and also the information for one and two successes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Aside from the **SRII** rules and those in the **Grimoire, Second Edition,** this book includes all the information needed to run **Harlequin's Back.** The gamemaster should read through the entire book before beginning the game. Some important plot developments do not become apparent until well into the adventure, but the gamemaster must lay the groundwork for these developments early on. He or she can only accomplish that by being familiar with the story line. The gamemaster must also thoroughly examine the maps, plans, diagrams, and player handouts included in this book. Where appropriate, the maps are coded or numbered to link each area to its description in the text.

Though **Harlequin's Back** as written tries to cover all the likely and even some of the unlikely ideas that the players might come up with, it is impossible to foresee every possible action the players might choose to take. Therefore, the gamemaster must be prepared to improvise if necessary. The **Plot Synopsis** later in this section summarizes in detail both the story background and the most probable course of the events. Within this synopsis, the first mention of names of characters important to **Harlequin's Back** appears in **boldface** type.

Harlequin's Back is divided into a series of adventures, most of which are self-contained stories, though some exist solely to connect two other adventures. Together, these adventures comprise the overall story line and advance the player characters toward the adventure's ultimate goal. Each adventure consists of a number of short encounters that describe the events the player characters will most likely face during **Harlequin's Back.**

Each adventure begins with a section entitled **Overview**, a device unique to **Harlequin's Back.** This section summarizes the events of the adventure in terms of how they fit into the overall story structure. The **Overview** also describes the metaphysical aspects of each adventure's events. The sections within each adventure follow standard **Shadowrun** format. Most of them contain four parts: **Tell It to Them Straight, Hooks, Behind the Scenes,** and **Debugging.**

Tell It to Them Straight is read aloud to the players. It describes where the player characters are and what is happening to them as though they were actually there. Depending on the player characters' previous choices and/or the point in the adventure at which the encounter occurs, the gamemaster may need to adapt the text to suit the situation. Any special instructions to the gamemaster in this section appear in **boldface** type.

The second section, **Hooks,** gives the gamemaster hints and tips about imagery to use in the scene, emotions to convey, sounds, sensations, textures, and so on. The information provided in this section varies in form and content from scene to scene, ranging from general themes to specific emotions. Often, the **Hooks** section describes symbolism and metaphors important to understanding the encounter. The metaphysical nature of events in **Harlequin's Back** makes the effective use of **Hooks** especially important. When no real change takes place in the player characters' environment from one chapter to the next, the **Hooks** information has been omitted rather than repeated.

The next section, **Behind the Scenes,** tells the gamemaster what is really happening in each encounter and proposes a potential sequence of events. Any maps needed to play an encounter are included in this section. Information the players can discover and possible consequences of the player characters' actions also appear here. Non-player character statistics needed to roleplay the encounter are usually included here as well. This section may also contain hints and suggestions for handling a particular encounter.

The final section of each encounter, **Debugging,** offers suggestions for getting the game back on track if things go too far wrong; for example, if the player characters overlook a vital piece of data or if half the team meets an untimely death. The gamemaster need not use any of the suggestions given in this section; if he or she can think of a better method of redirecting the game, he should feel free to use it. As always, the gamemaster may also let the chips fall where they may.

Because of the unusual nature of this adventure, the runners cannot use their contacts to obtain information, and so **Harlequin's Back** does not have a standard **Legwork** section. The player characters can only do the usual legwork in one adventure (**A Fistful of Karma,** pp. 54–80), and so **Legwork** in that adventure lists information and rumors about various people and aspects of the story that the runners can learn from local folk. **A Fistful of Karma** also includes a small **Cast of Shadows** section that contains descriptions and statistics for the major characters of that adventure. The **Master Cast of Shadows** section at the back of this book includes game information and roleplaying hints for the major and/or recurring non-player characters in **Harlequin's Back. Picking Up the Pieces** provides tips on wrapping up the entire adventure and

awarding Karma, as well as offering suggestions for answering unresolved player or player character questions. Finally, the **Player Handouts** chapter at the end of this book includes several handouts to be given to the players as their characters uncover clues and vital bits of information.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Because **Harlequin's Back** is in many ways Harlequin's astral quest, the background of the adventure begins with Harlequin himself. Harlequin is ancient, though not the oldest being on the planet (someone else, not even human, has that dubious honor). He is not even the oldest of his generation. But through a combination of circumstance (or fate), cunning, ambition, and sheer willpower, Harlequin is perhaps the most powerful among them. He has few true friends and about the same number of true enemies, but more would fear him if they understood him.

Unlike most of his contemporaries (please don't say peers; that would anger him), Harlequin does not desire temporal power. The grand machinations of politics, economics, and society do not interest him half as much as the details of how those forces work. His fascination with the nuts and bolts of life has enabled him to maintain connections of one kind or another with various long-lived power bases that exist in 2055 without any of them perceiving him as a threat. His ongoing metaphysical research, especially since the re-emergence of magic, has also kept him in touch with the world as a whole, though he realizes that only subconsciously.

Lately, Harlequin has felt bored. For years, his research, and his fierce hatred for Ehran the Scribe over a minor affront centuries before, dominated his attention. After avenging that slight a few years ago (in the original **Harlequin** adventure), Harlequin gave his full attention to his metaphysical researches and to the instruction of his new apprentice, Jane Foster (Ehran the Scribe's bastard daughter, though she does not know it). Harlequin discovered, however, that he had lost his sense of purpose. Once upon a time, in a land long blasted to dust, Harlequin had been a hero, a knight in shining armor, until a tragedy he cannot bear to speak or think of broke his banner of knighthood. In this modern time, with nothing to propel him forward and again without a purpose, he lapsed into deep melancholy fueled by drink.

The opening story, **Voices from the Past,** finds Harlequin in this intoxicated state. The events of the story can be interpreted as a true vision or as an alcohol-induced hallucination conjured up by his subconscious mind (which may be more in tune with reality than the rest of his psyche). Real or not, the vision spoke of a frightening truth that Harlequin easily confirmed—dark days were approaching the Sixth World. As the level of magic in the world increased, the barriers between this world and others weakened, allowing nightmare creatures to travel to this world. These dark, horrible beasts had come to the world before, most recently during Harlequin's youth, and they sought to devour everything in their path. Some wished to consume physical matter: rocks, trees, grass, animals, flesh. Others desired less tangible nutrition: emotions, intellect, dreams, desires. They cared nothing for life as we understand it. And they had invaded in force—thousands, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of them had appeared across the globe, all-consuming and unstoppable. Unable to stand against this vile horde, the world's civilizations hid behind powerful magics and waited for the level of magic in the world to drop below the level at which these creatures could survive. Once the creatures departed, the people re-emerged to reclaim their land. The creatures have many names, but Harlequin calls them "the Enemy."

From Harlequin's research and his own experiences, he knows that the metaphysical barriers between the worlds should not yet have weakened to the point where the creatures can cross from one to the other in any numbers. This calamity should not occur for another 2,500 years or so. Yet Harlequin's vision and the results of subsequent research showed that the creatures would arrive early—within the next decade, in fact—because of a single event in recent U.S. history.

In the early days of magic's return to the modern world, the now-defunct United States of America fought and lost a political battle with a band of powerful, magically aware Native Americans led by a man named Daniel Howling Coyote. To force the return of traditional Amerindian lands to their rightful owners, Howling Coyote and others employed a powerful magic ritual known as the Great Ghost Dance, which allowed them to control the weather and much of the environment in western North America. To demonstrate their power (and the consequences of setting aside their demands), they caused volcanic eruptions and created violent storms. The Ghost Dancers won, but at a price Howling Coyote and his followers had either failed to foresee or chosen to accept. It was blood magic that powered the Great Ghost Dance and other, smaller ghost dances, and the raising of such power cost the lives of many of the Dance's practitioners.

The dancers may have been unaware of a second dreadful consequence of the Great Ghost Dance. The Dance created a "spike" in the level of the world's magic at the site where it was performed; the expenditure of life energy and the powerful emotions raised the level of magic in that area significantly higher than everywhere else in the world. (This effect resembles the background count concept described on p. 89 of **Grimoire II,** and also discussed in the **Tír na nÓg** and **Germany** sourcebooks.) In the area of the spike, therefore, the creatures that ravaged the world millennia ago are "closer" to the Sixth World than at any other place. The presence of the spike shortens their "journey" across the metaplanes from thousands of years to a mere few.

The Sixth World is doomed unless someone takes drastic action. Knowing this, the Great Powers of the world (in the metaphysical sense) have tapped Harlequin on the shoulder and told him to take care of the problem. Of course Harlequin's going to need a little help. ...

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

It is impossible to create a published adventure that provides the appropriate opposition level for every group of player characters. Some groups are inherently more powerful than others.

The gamemaster must adjust the game statistics and capabilities of the opposition to provide an appropriate level of difficulty for the group. If the adventure does not suit the player characters' strengths and weaknesses, the gamemaster may use it as an outline to develop an adventure of his or her own. Or, if it works well except for a quirk here and there, the gamemaster can change any part of the plot and story events to make the adventure a better one for the players.

The adventure suggests Threat and Professional Ratings for each of the NPCs. As indicated in the **SRII** rules, use Threat Rating dice in place of Dice Pools for these characters (p. 187, **SRII**). Gamemasters should adjust the actual Threat Ratings to better reflect the level of opposition presented by the player characters, especially in those adventures where maintaining game balance promises to be exceptionally tricky. The gamemaster should feel free to modify Threat Rating dice on the fly during an encounter to provide the proper level of opposition. To that end, the text occasionally includes notes on how tough a battle or encounter should be for the player characters.

The gamemaster will find such manipulation crucial to keeping some of the encounters in this adventure at a manageable level. The fights in **Harlequin's Back** work best when choreographed like an action movie. Though lead and magic flies everywhere, only a few of the bad guys actually get a clean shot at the heroes at any one time. That limitation, and the application of the **SRII** Professional Rating rules, should help keep large fights under control.

For gamemasters using the first-edition **Shadowrun** rules, the Professional Rating system works as follows. Nonplayer characters with a Professional Rating of 1 will withdraw from a fight after taking a Light wound, those rated at 2 will withdraw after taking a Moderate wound, those rated at 3 after a Serious wound, and those rated at 4 will fight until unconscious or dead.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

As **Harlequin** is fond of saying, "When Fate taps you on the shoulder, you'd best pay attention. Unfortunately, she has that blasted habit of tapping you on the *opposite* shoulder, so that when you turn around she's actually on your other side, giggling like a schoolgirl. I hate that." The fickleness of Fate is a theme that underlies this entire adventure, as the player characters soon discover.

A few weeks before the events of **Harlequin's Back** begin in the **Shadowrun** world, Fate chooses her soldiers for the adventure's astral quest. Harlequin believes that Fate is one of the Great Powers of the universe, and that she decides or at least helps along certain events that are "destined" to occur. Harlequin accepts that Fate plays a big part in the story behind the events of this adventure.

For whatever reason, Fate picks the player characters. (Harlequin wouldn't necessarily have made the same choices, but if Fate thinks these refugees from polite society can handle the job, he'll lay in a big supply of patience and good humor and see how it all turns out.) Her touch initially manifests itself in subtle ways; for example, the characters seem luckier, and everyone they meet treats them with the respect they've always suspected they deserved. Animals stop and stare as they pass; birds stop singing or suddenly start warbling en masse. Shaman player characters notice increasing numbers of animals appropriate to their totems following them around. All magicians notice that their conjured spirits, both old allies and the newly summoned, behave with unusual deference. In short, things get weird.

One night after two or three very peculiar weeks, the runners fall asleep and begin to dream. Though they do not discover the truth immediately, they are embarking on an astral quest—namely, Harlequin's quest to repel the creatures that seek to invade the world from astral space.

The runners find themselves on a dark, lonely road that ends at a river. Sitting at the riverbank is a gaudy, tacky, glass-bottomed boat similar to those found in various watery tourist traps. In fact, the player characters can still read a time-faded "Aqua Park" logo on the boat's side. The boatman, however, (dare we say ferryman?) is a nightmarish figure that the runners find simultaneously terrifying, oddly familiar, and comforting. The boatman is the Dweller on the Threshold, guardian of the metaplanes. He challenges the runners, forcing them to prove their worth to make this quest. Though the runners have no idea what's really going on, the Dweller gives them a few clues. He warns them that "this is a quest most serious," and that to turn back will bring dire consequences to them and everything they know.

Once the player characters pass the Dweller's tests, they proceed across the river. On the other side, they appear to wake up, and they find themselves crammed into the back of a minivan driving across a desert in southwestern North America. Their driver is Harlequin; navigating in the front seat next to him is his apprentice, **Jane "Frosty" Foster** (familiar to runners who participated in the original **Harlequin** adventure). Briefly and matter-of-factly, Harlequin explains a few of the circumstances surrounding the player characters, though certainly not all. He tells them about the effects of the Great Ghost Dance, the impending invasion of the dreadful creatures, and the quest the runners are about to undertake.

As twilight falls, the van turns off the highway on to a dirt road. Hours later, in the depths of the night, the runners arrive at a place as remote as any they have ever seen. Every one of them, even those not magically gifted, can taste the power there.

Harlequin parks the van, sets the alarm, and then gives the runners a final briefing. He tells them they are to search for **Thayla's Voice**, the magical singing voice of an ancient and powerful queen that now resides in an enchanted **Songbird.** (Thayla's story is told in **The Bridge, Part One,** p. 22.) Actually finding the Songbird, however, is the last stage of the quest. Before that, the runners must gather items necessary to transport the bird from where it resides to where it is needed; they must find a cage, a perch or swing, and a hood to cover the bird's eyes. Harlequin does not know where or in what form they will find these things, but he does know that the runners will be tested in each Place before they can gain the item.

Harlequin also warns the runners to be aware of the symbolic nature of their journey; he tells them to look for the metaphoric as well as the literal meaning of what they see and experience, and says that the events of their quest will ultimately tell them what they must do. Harlequin himself will undertake a different leg of the quest, the search for a certain ritual needed to complete his appointed task. He does not know the nature of the ritual or where he may find it. Such, he says, is the fickle finger of Fate.

Note that though the text of the adventures assumes Jane Foster accompanies the player characters, her presence is not required. If the team does not include a female character, Jane Foster goes with the runners. If a female team member already exists, Jane may or may not be present, at the gamemaster's discretion.

The quest begins as the runners and Harlequin descend into the earth and emerge on a huge outcropping that extends over the edge of a great chasm (see **The Bridge, Part One**, pp. 22–26). Far across the gap, they barely can see what Harlequin calls the **Enemy**—a swarming horde of creatures building a bridge. The chasm represents the gulf in the metaplanes between our world and the world of the creatures. The outcropping is the spike of magic created by the Great Ghost Dance, and the bridge is the journey that the creatures are undertaking to reach the Sixth World. Harlequin tells the player characters that they must stop the creatures before they finish their bridge. Before he can say anything else, loathsome beings attack the player characters. A startled Harlequin fends them off, and with a gift of Karma sends the runners on their way.

In the first adventure, **Aftermath** (pp. 27–33), the runners find themselves in North America's Pacific Northwest region, in a distant future time following a terrible cataclysm. In this Place, the runners become involved in the plight of a tiny community known as the **Enclave** and their battle with a rival settlement known as the **Collective**. The team must discover and retrieve the hood for the Songbird. This item is currently in the possession of the Collective's leader, a man named **Oscuro**. Oscuro is actually a manifestation of a human named **Darke**, a contemporary of the runners' and their nemesis throughout the astral quest. Darke is an ally of the very creatures this astral quest seeks to thwart; in many of the adventures his avatars symbolize his evil nature by appearing as dual beings, both human and monster. Harlequin also has a manifestation in this Place; he is **Leroy**, the leader of the Enclave. **Thayla** is also present symbolically; she is Leroy's wife **Talla.**

The next Place to which the runners travel blends the American Wild West of the 1880s with odd, neo-Victorian variations of technology and magic. This adventure segment, **A fistful of Karma** (pp. 54–80), pits the runners against the enigmatic and evil **Mr. Trey** (a.k.a. Darke), the oppressive owner of the local mine. Mr. Trey wants to buy up all the land around the peaceful town of Valley Hope in order to expand his nefarious strip-mining operation. Also in this Place are a deaf saloon singer named **Celia**, the manifestation of Thayla; the reluctant sheriff **Bergamot**, the manifestation of Harlequin; a just-out-of-jail-and-out-for-blood gunslinger named **Dred Francis;** and **Sy Vants,** a powerful ranch owner and thug with a sadistic interest in Celia. Vants is an avatar of the dark warrior, the being that represents the Enemy (see **Elements of the Story,** p. 12 in **Running Harlequin**). As an additional complication, laws of magic and technology in Valley Hope do not work quite like the runners expect. In this Place they must find the Songbird's perch—they do not realize at first that it is a piece of bone they will have to take from Trey the hard way.

The next adventure, **By the Sword** (pp. 81–102), takes place in an Arthurian England in which the Grail Quest never occurred, **Lancelot** betrayed King Arthur for lust alone, and eternal winter grips the land until the murdered **Spring Champion** can be reborn. In this Place the runners must find "the sword that ran through the best and finest Knight of the Round Table." That knight, however, may not be the person they expect to find. In addition, the sword is broken; to repair it, the player characters must meddle in the magic of men and women, of power-rich places, and of redemption bought with blood. The player characters must take the mended sword to the next Place, where an NPC known as the **Architect** will build the cage to hold the Songbird.

The next adventure, **The Impossible Dream** (pp. 103–119), takes the runners to a realm of pure metaphor where the inhabitants spend all their time building a great **Tower** in hopes of reaching unattainable Heaven. The runners' journey through this Place is rife with misdirection, confusion, and lies, and the landscape is littered with hidden meanings and secrets. High up in the Tower, the **Foreman** (Darke) holds the lovely **Maiden** (Thayla) hostage to prevent the Architect (Harlequin), who helped begin the Tower's construction from taking steps against him. The runners must rescue the Maiden and free the people of the Tower from the Foreman's oppression. As their reward, the runners ask the Architect to build the cage to hold the Songbird.

Next, the runners travel to the Place where the Songbird waits. In this adventure, **The Songbird** (pp. 120–121), the runners discover the fate of the land Thayla once ruled. They may also learn that the bird's song without Thayla's will behind it is not strong enough to repel the Enemy. Bird in hand (or rather, in cage), the runners return to the chasm and the Bridge, more than likely believing that they have finished the astral quest.

Unluckily for the runners, they have miles to go before they sleep. In **The Bridge, Part Two** (pp. 122–123), the runners confirm their suspicion that the Songbird alone cannot stop the creatures. Harlequin tells them they must find Thayla herself, in whatever faraway land she lives with her dark companion. Off the runners go to the next Place, following the Songbird to a forbidding Victorian mansion (**The Masquerade**, pp. 124–142). The master of the house, **Lord Umberley** (Darke), is holding a great masquerade ball at which the runners are expected. Thayla is held prisoner in the mansion by Umberley's brother, **Nacht** (the dark warrior), and the runners must rescue her from Nacht's and Umberley's evil clutches. Umberley has set the runners up to fail, unaware that some of the **Great Powers** of the metaplanes (totems and so on) have come to the masquerade ball to watch the final acts of the quest play out.

Having reunited Thayla with her Voice, the runners return to the chasm (**The Bridge, Part Three,** pp. 143–144), where they find Darke attempting to pollute the Place so that Thayla cannot use her magic there. The player characters must stop Darke's blood magic and destroy his minions in a giant, climactic battle. Once they accomplish this, the runners and Harlequin face an interesting dilemma. The Enemy's human allies know the location of the outcropping over the chasm, and they also know that Thayla is there. If the runners leave her there alone, the Enemy's allies will almost certainly come and kill her. The runners must freely choose to stay and guard Thayla. If they do, the Great Powers intervene to protect the place from the Enemy ... for a time.

RUNNING HARLEQUIN

This section provides a few helpful hints and guidelines for running **Harlequin's Back**. The gamemaster should read through this book as many times as necessary to become completely familiar with both the obvious and subtle aspects of the story and the way in which all the elements interweave throughout the adventure.

RULES AND LIMITATIONS

The different Places in the metaplanes that the runners visit all have unique rules and laws, especially for how magic

works. The gamemaster should follow the rules written to represent the unique qualities of each Place as closely as possible to help maintain game balance, but may feel free to alter them to suit the specific players participating in the game. Everyone games for different reasons, and so the gamemaster may change the way each Place works if necessary to ensure that everyone has a good time. There's no point in being faithful to the written adventure if players get too frustrated or bored silly.

One rule for magic applies across the board: NO ASTRAL PROJECTION IS ALLOWED. Player characters may not astrally project during the astral quest. Doing so will quickly unbalance the story and defeat the purpose of the astral quest by revealing too much information. DO NOT ALLOW CHARACTERS TO ASTRALLY PROJECT DURING THIS ADVENTURE.

CHOOSING PLAYER CHARACTERS

Though technically there are no restrictions on who can successfully participate in **Harlequin's Back**, the gamemaster should think carefully about what kind of player characters are "chosen by Fate" to aid in the astral quest. Ideally, the participants should be more than murder machines. They should have some redeeming qualities: compassion, pity, empathy, valor, for example. They need not be heroes (hey, this is **Shadowrun**—would we limit a **Shadowrun** adventure to heroic player characters?), but some positive element should set them apart from the amoral street scum and double-dealers with whom they regularly traffic.

The characters' abilities should not depend too much on external equipment. Player characters such as deckers or riggers, who need machinery in order to use their special talents, will have the hardest time playing active roles in the story. Some of the **Harlequin's Back** adventures simply offer no role for a decker or rigger, even when transformed to make them appropriate to the setting in which the adventure takes place (a rigger appearing as a charioteer, for example). Though such characters may participate in this adventure, the nature of their abilities makes such participation more difficult. Of course, some enterprising players may thrive on this challenge. As always, the gamemaster makes the final decision.

Any kind of magician may play an active part in **Harlequin's Back,** though the various types may find their magic altered in subtle or dramatic ways depending on the adventure. Characters with magical ability may not understand the rules of magic operating from Place to Place, but then life's full of chaos. Characters with cyberware retain their abilities in most Places, though the rationale for those abilities may shift radically.

The adventure **By the Sword** requires the presence of a female runner. If necessary, the NPC Jane Foster may play this role.

HANDLING PLAYER-CHARACTER DEATH

Harlequin's Back has important consequences for the **Shadowrun** universe, and the gamemaster must make an equally important decision regarding the ultimate fate of the player characters involved in the adventure. If characters die, the gamemaster may choose one of three destinies for them.

If a player character dies in an adventure, he is "dead" only for that adventure and earns no Karma Award for that adventure. He rejoins the group at the start of the next adventure.

A dead player character also may stay "dead" for all the remaining adventures in **Harlequin's Back**. In this case, the player character wakes up back in the "real" **Shadowrun** universe at the same time as the rest of the team but with no memory of what has happened. He keeps his Karma Awards for the adventures in which he participated, but gains nothing for the rest. The gamemaster should also subtract the character's Karma from the Team Karma Pool (see p. 191, **SRII**).

Third, a player character who dies may simply be dead. Period. Such a character dies in the physical world as well as the astral. In this case also, the gamemaster should subtract the character's Karma from the Team Karma Pool.

The option the gamemaster chooses affects the Karma Awards at the end of the adventure. If the gamemaster prefers, he may ask the players to choose what death means in this adventure.

ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

On the surface, **Harlequin's Back** involves the runners attempting to prevent the early arrival of the Enemy in the Sixth World. Underlying that story is Harlequin's own recognition of and coming to terms with who and what he has become. Careful observance of the events in each of the adventures shows Harlequin (through his various aspects) often unsure and self-doubting, beset by personal demons and more willing to evade a problem than face it head-on.

The players can do little except observe the battle in Harlequin's psyche, unless they are very observant and can manipulate him during **The Bridge**, **Part Three** (p. 143). Nonetheless, his mental and emotional conflict, as much as the characters' struggle to thwart the invading Enemy, drives **Harlequin's Back**. All the tangible and ephemeral elements that Harlequin and the runners must examine and embrace or reject appear in various guises in each of the Places. Each of these elements can be represented symbolically, as described below. The gamemaster can use these symbols to more closely tie together the separate adventures by stressing the common elements running throughout the story, and as a device to give the player characters' actions deeper significance.

Sacrifice

The ultimate denial of self-interest for the sake of others, sacrifice is often the greatest expression of heroism. Sacrifice can be easily corrupted if made for questionable reasons.

Redemption

In this story, redemption represents the reclaiming of lost ideals: a return to older and perhaps better ways.

Thayla

In all her forms throughout the story, Thayla represents heroism, sacrifice, strength, and artistic accomplishment.

Harlequin

Though loath to admit his own metaphysical part in the adventure, Harlequin appears throughout as a torn warrior, angry poet, and divided soul seeking physical and/or spiritual redemption.

The Enemy

The Enemy symbolizes corruption, destruction, mindless consumption, deceit, temptation, and obsession. Throughout the story, the Enemy manifests primarily as Darke and his shadows, as well as the dark warrior. For the player characters, Darke represents the opposition to be overcome and the major force to be reckoned with, but he is only a human ally and a symbol of the Enemy's greater darkness, which is represented by the dark warrior.

Corruption

The Enemy most clearly represents corruption in the story, using the dark warrior as its agent, but corruption also takes other forms. For example, corruption lies behind many actions people take to get what they want: accepting temptation, self-centered behavior, ego, ambition, and so on.

Beauty

Beauty of shape, motion, expression, thought, and deed, and its value to individuals and the universe at large, appears throughout **Harlequin's Back**. Often represented by Thayla, beauty is also present in the Songbird and others.

Conflict

Conflict may exist for good or ill, represented by a clash of forces (large or small) and/or by desires in opposition.

Transformation

Thayla giving her voice to the Songbird and then retrieving it, the redemption of Lancelot, and the rebirth of the Spring Champion all provide examples of transformation.

Restraint

Restraint manifests as restriction and isolation, symbolized by the imprisonment of the Maiden, Thayla's Voice captive in the Songbird, and Thayla held prisoner by Nacht (the dark warrior).

Love

Love appears in **Harlequin's Back** in Thayla's love of her land, which leads to her sacrifice. Other possibilities the gamemaster may wish to explore include love springing from beauty and being betrayed by corruption.

The Runners

The runners represent untried potential and the limitless possibilities of the unknown.

FORESHADOWS

OVERVIEW

This section sets up the adventures of **Harlequin's Back**. It describes events that take place prior to the start of the story, events that foreshadow the astral adventure. These odd, inexplicable occurrences add atmosphere and suspense to the characters' lives at a time when they suspect nothing unusual. Ideally, the gamemaster should integrate these events into stories and adventures that have no connections, real or imagined, to the **Harlequin's Back** stories. Be particularly subtle if the players know the gamemaster plans to run **Harlequin's Back** in the near future. Let the players sweat over their own fevered imaginings; their characters certainly don't know what's going to hit them.

HOOKS

The key words here are odd, spooky, weird, and foreboding. The following events have no quickly accessible explanations and they should leave the players wondering what's going on. The more weirded-out they are, the better.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Big things don't just happen suddenly. They build slowly, like a growing storm, scattering hints for the perceptive observer. The events in this section should foreshadow the main adventure in much the same way. Weave these events into any adventures or stories that occur before **Harlequin's Back** begins. As always, these events serve only as suggestions—feel free to extrapolate from them or invent different ones.

BARKING CATS

One or more player characters notice that every animal they see acts uncharacteristically. Sometimes the animals get very quiet and still around the runners. Other times they get very loud and excited, but seldom violent. Even weirder, animals that should behave violently, don't. Guard dogs trained to attack, or at least bark, sit and stare with their tongues hanging out.

Use barking dogs, howling cats, a flock of birds exploding suddenly out of a tree, all the animals in an area suddenly being quiet, all the animals watching the runners as they pass, and so on. Describe the event as offhandedly as possible; let the players assign as much or as little value to the events as they wish.

LUCK IS WITH THEM

For a short time, lower all target numbers for the players by 1. Don't tell them why, just do it. This will completely freak out any "rules-lawyer" players who insist on calculating all the target numbers along with the gamemaster.

Refresh the runners' Team Karma Pool suddenly for no easily determined reason. To the player characters, it will seem like they suddenly got "lucky."

Give the characters a couple of extra successes just when they can really use them (or even if they can't). Let the players determine the actual number of successes as usual, then determine the final result by adding 1 or 2 additional successes. Again, don't tell them why, just do it. Let them wonder.

SUDDENLY, THEY HAVE RESPECT

Subtly change the verbal tones or body language of nonplayer characters, so that for no apparent reason the runners receive more respect and/or fear from their friends, strangers, co-workers, allies, enemies, spirits—everybody. Everyone acts as if something about the characters has changed, something that no one can see or identify but reacts to, just the same. The players cannot figure out what they're doing differently or how to keep it going—it just happens.

PORTENTOUS DREAMS

Dreams are a very common foreshadowing device in folklore and mythology. As the beginning of the events of **Harlequin's Back** loom closer, each of the players experiences such a dream. Choose from the suggestions below, make up your own, or skip the whole idea entirely if you prefer. If handled properly, portentous dreams can add greatly to the ambiance of the adventure and give the runners clues to the adventure's goals and their possible actions.

> A beautiful, raven-haired woman garbed in medieval dress sits and gazes into a reflecting pool. The reflection she sees is not her own, but that of a young, handsome elven warrior in stunning filigreed armor of silver and blue crystal. Suddenly, a black arrow strikes the warrior, who recoils in pain. Inky blackness pours out of the arrow wound, filling the pool, and the woman screams as a black, oily arm forms from the surface of the water and grabs her by the hair. It drags her into the water, where she begins to drown.

A single tower, topped with a spire of copper and gold, rises high into a sapphire midday sky. The dreamer is flying, circling the tower, which rises above a sprawling, glittering city. A woman's voice, so beautiful and inspiring that it defies description and comprehension, sings a song. The dreamer rises, reaches the top of the tower and enters a room there. The large room is dozens of meters across and opens to the air at each of the cardinal points (north, south, east, and west). A frail wooden birdcage hangs from a thin gold chain in the center of the room. The song is coming from inside the cage. Gliding forward and looking in, the dreamer sees a breathtaking white and black bird, its head lifted in joyous song. The rest of the cage's interior contains a vile, horrid mess of rotted food, as if the cage had not been cleaned in centuries. Suddenly a shadow falls across the cage, the bird stammers, and the dreamer awakes.

The dreamer cannot lose the recurring image of a young ork dashing into the street to push her toddler son out of the path of an oncoming automated cargo truck. The truck strikes the ork, smashing her against its grill and pulling her under, to be crushed by each of the truck's six wheels. The dream replays in slow motion, and each time the dreamer sees foreknowledge in the woman's eyes. She knows what will happen if she saves her child, and she knows what will happen if she does not. Each time she saves the child, and each time she dies slowly and painfully on the pavement, her weeping son pulling at her jacket as the last of her blood and breath bubbles from her lips.

A shaman character sees the body of her totem animal impaled on a terrible, twisted black spear. On closer examination, the dreamer sees that the weapon is made from the bones of children.

A giant tree grows toward the heavens, then its leaves and branches wither and die, and the tree collapses into dead ruin in the space of a few minutes. The dreamer steps forward into the debris and sees a large coyote mask. The dreamer picks it up. The eyes blink, and the mask laughs as the dreamer wakes.

A character with a substantial amount of cyberware finds himself lying on a hospital table. He looks down and sees that his body is composed of metal and wires. A gloved hand pushes aside the blinding white lamp that shines down on him, and a doctor leans into view. His hair is covered and his face masked. Still, the dreamer can see the doctor's pale face, decorated with a single black diamond painted above his left eye. The doctor points to an identical table and asks, "How can you hope to save her when you have no blood?" The dreamer looks and sees a stunning raven-haired woman with pale, waxen skin lying on the other table. A tube is connected to her body in preparation for a blood transfusion, but the doctor holds the other end. The dreamer's body has no veins from which to draw blood.

These next three dream images provide clues to actions the runners will need to perform in the adventure. They do not have to be given in a dream, but they should be presented to the players in some way prior to the start of the adventure. They need not be presented in the order written, but the primary image of each dream should be strongly emphasized.

A long, narrow piece of shiny metal that is broken in two melts quickly, as if subjected to high temperatures. It runs and pools and then slowly rises upward in the form of a finely wrought cage, perhaps for a bird. The sound of a metalsmith at work, lightly tapping his tools on metal, can be heard.

A beautiful black and white bird lifts its head in song, but then a pair of hands—one of them male, the other female—gently picks up the bird and carefully slips a white leather hood over its head. The bird accepts the hood without protest and stops singing.

A stunning woman with black hair and pale skin, wearing a beautiful red silk gown, crouches on what seems to be a long white piece of wood. She is crying and trying to sing, but makes no sound.

WHAT'S WITH THE LAUGHING CLOWN?

Different characters at different times see an obese, badly made-up clown holding three black balloons and laughing hysterically at the characters. If they chase him, he hikes his pantaloons and runs, giggling madly. The runners cannot catch him.

ODD THINGS OVERHEARD

Meaningless bits of overheard conversation, perhaps some of the following suggestions, stick in the characters' minds.

- "I feel like I'm only a shadow of the man I once was, hoping that no one turns off the light ... "
- "What did he expect them to do? It wasn't like he really cared or anything ... "
- "It *looked* fine. *Everything* looked fine, but how was I to know? Who'd have thought to look *there* ... "
- "Gawd, I wish that bird would stop singing, it's driving me fraggin' *nuts*!"
- "She's like a different woman. She's got drive now, a purpose. I'm not sure I didn't like the old her better ... "

• "Sometimes you gotta take a stand, tell them you're tired of the drek and just deal with it. If not you, who?"

LESS THAN TWENTY QUESTIONS

At some point, each of the runners is approached on the street by an attractive member of the appropriate sex, who asks the character a few questions. The players feel comfortable enough to answer without hesitation or deceit. Stress this to the players—they should answer without hesitation or deceit. The answers must be the complete truth for their characters. If they don't have an obvious answer and feel they have to "make one up," let them. That answer then becomes the truth. Have them answer the questions in private so none of the other players can hear. These questions have been duplicated on a cheery looking form that can and should be photocopied from the **Player Handouts** section, p. 151.

1. What's your favorite color?
2. The last time you wore a costume for fun, what was it?
3. Under what circumstances, if any, would you sacrifice your life?
4. What's the best thing you've ever done?
5. What's your favorite number?
6. Which great figure from mythology, literature, or the media do you identify with?
7. What's the worst thing you've ever done?
8. Under what circumstances, if any, would you betray your friends?
9. What manner of dying do you fear most?

These questions should occur in such a way as to have no connection to the **Harlequin's Back** adventures. These questions should simply worry the players, and provide some insight into their metaphysical lives. Some of the answers become relevant in later sections.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

When the gamemaster considers the players to be sufficiently rattled by these events, the actual adventure can begin. A terrible thunderstorm rages across Seattle (or wherever the runners currently reside) the night all this begins. Torrential rain pours down on the city, accompanied by blinding flashes of lightning and building-shaking blasts of thunder. Local weather mavens are calling it the "Worst Storm of the Century" with far too much glee.

Eventually, the runners find themselves dropping off to sleep. Though they may be scattered across the city, they all doze off at roughly the same time.

And the fun begins. ...

DEBUGGING

The runners can only get off track in this chapter by failing to become nearly paralyzed by paranoia. Move on to the next chapter, **Into the Desert**, p. 17.

INTO THE DESERT

OVERVIEW

The runners are ready to hit the astral road with Harlequin and Jane Foster. But they must get past the Dweller on the Threshold, who marks the official beginning of their astral quest. They learn some of the reasons behind what's going on, including things they'd probably rather not think about. But their journey is only beginning. ...

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following as the astral quest begins:

The faintest sliver of a moon peeks out at you from the turbulent night sky. You stand with the rest of your team on a dirt road that is barely wide enough for all of you to walk abreast. The road bears signs of frequent passage, but no one else is in sight. The empty road stretches into the darkness as if it might go on forever. The deep forest on either side of the road is curiously still, the silence unbroken by even the rustlings of nocturnal wanderers. Even the air seems still, undisturbed by the slightest breeze. The road curves away ahead of you. If you listen very carefully, you can hear the quiet sound of what you tentatively identify as lapping water.

A cloud obscures the moonlight and you can see a faint glow of what you take to be firelight from beyond the curve in the road. A barely perceptible breeze blows in that direction. You walk toward the glow, and the lapping-water sound grows stronger.

Read this when the characters reach the river:

The road drops gently down a hill toward a wide, black river that stretches as far as you can see. At the end of the road lies a simple wooden dock, a few meters long, lined with a row of burning torches.

A long boat is moored alongside the dock. The vessel stretches almost the length of the dock, and it seems to be colored light blue or light green. It seems to be made of fiberglass and apparently has a see-through glass or plastic bottom. As you get closer, you can make out the words "Aqua Park" printed along the boat's side in fading block letters. Strange to be seeing something like that in this setting. ...

Suddenly, you notice a person standing at the end of the dock. You aren't sure if he was there a minute ago. Even in the firelight, you can barely make him out. He wears long, dark, tattered loose robes. The robe's hood obscures his face, but the breeze catches the folds of the garment and pushes them aside, and for a moment you see something old, dried, and shriveled. With a twisted, gnarled hand the figure beckons you to come aboard.

Read this as the boat pushes off from the dock and heads out across the river:

The robed figure guides the boat as it moves away from the dock. You hear no sounds of a motor or any other kind of propulsion. You look at the figure, stifle a laugh at the comic contrast created by his presence behind the wheel of the tourist boat, and realize that someone is standing back on the dock.

The female figure is poised at the dock's edge. The light from the torches silhouettes her body beneath layers of a sheer robe that sparkles with a myriad of colors. She waves her hand, a spray of colored threads fall away from her, and she fades into the darkness. ...

You realize your pilot is gone and so is the boat. You find yourselves somewhere else.

Pause a moment, and then read the following:

"One of you wouldn't happen to have a cigarette lighter, would you?" the elf asks. "Figures we'd get this far and the damn lighter'd be broken."

You feel a jolt and most of you strike your heads against the low roof of a minivan. It seems impossible, but your entire team is packed into the rear of the vehicle. Behind the wheel sits an elf clad in a black T-shirt emblazoned with some picture you can't make out. A pale woman wearing a faded tank top and black denim shorts sits next to him, riding shotgun. The elf glances back at you, waiting for an answer, and you see that he's wearing a baseball cap bearing the logo of the Brooklyn Dodgers (you aren't sure how you recognize that). Then you recognize the driver. It's Harlequin. He grins.

"Confused?" he asks, as the woman turns toward you as well, regarding you critically from behind a pair of incredibly narrow Italian sunglasses. A moment passes and the woman sighs, shakes her head and goes back to watching the moonlit desert scenery outside the van windows—which you now realize stretches for kilometers and kilometers in every direction.

"Fraggin' right you are. Weird stuff, weird times. Shaking the walls of heaven kinda times, ya dig? Don't freak though, you wouldn't be here if somebody didn't think you could handle it." He pauses to take a drag from his cigarette. "You chummers ever done this type of thing before? You know, slinging about the netherworlds—er, the metaplanes—righting wrongs, performing grand deeds, all that drek?" He pauses again, regards them, and then says, "Well, don't worry about it. Ya gotta start sometime."

Harlequin takes a long drag on his cigarette, which does not seem to be burning down. He gestures with it. "She told you what's going down here?" he asks. "You know—Fate, Destiny, the Weaver, Kismet, Lady Luck. She's the one who picked you for this, chummers, not me. So make sure you pay your proper thanks to the cosmos when you get the chance. She tapped me on the shoulder too, and then did that thing where she darts around to the opposite side. I hate that. Anyway, it's not like we've got a choice. Had she asked, I'da said yes. Only makes sense, after all."

He then turns back toward the road ahead and eventually directs the minivan off the road and on to a barely visible track in the hard desert ground.

Read this when the minivan reaches the site of the Great Ghost Dance:

Without warning, the minivan lurches to a stop along the road. Harlequin studies the surroundings for a moment and then says, softly, "We're here." He shuts off the van's engine but leaves the headlights blazing.

The elf opens his door and steps out, letting the cold night air into the van. You do the same, walking forward to where he stands, a few meters ahead of the van. The woman is the last out.

"Can you smell it?" the elf asks no one in particular. "Frag, I can almost hear it, too."

The van's headlights shine out on to a wide, clear area. As your eyes become more accustomed to the light, you can see that much of the area is even more barren and flatter than the land surrounding it. Though little life is visible here in the desert, nothing at all seems to want to grow in the flat expanse.

"I wonder how many circles there were, how many people," he says solemnly. "Did they use drums, or did they just dance? Did the sky or the ground open up for them? Did any of the Powers come to watch? How many died? How many lived? How many wished they hadn't? And who the frag taught them how to do it?"

He turns back toward you, pulling off his baseball cap and brushing back his hair. "This is where it happened, chummers. This is where they broke the spirit, pardon the pun, of the good ol' U.S. of A. This is where they danced the Big One, the Great Ghost Dance. And this is where we start."

Give the characters some time to interact with Harlequin and examine their surroundings, then read the following:

Harlequin quietly paces out a large circle, roughly 20 meters in diameter, then walks toward the middle of the circle without speaking. Jane Foster follows him around the edge of the circle, but she doesn't head inside.

Finally, Harlequin stops at the exact center, looks up at the sky and then down at the ground. He raises his right hand and

a small metallic globe of silver light rises from it, growing in brilliance until it illuminates the entire area in a light that casts no shadows.

"Magic leaves an imprint wherever you work it," he says. "Usually it's fairly insignificant and produces no lasting change. But when you work magic on the scale of what was performed here, it's a different tale entirely.

"Life's energies empower magic, and when life is expended in that effort, the result can be staggering. And it leaves a permanent impression on the area. You see, magic, throughout most of the world, exists at a certain level. As time goes on, that level increases as part of the cycle you call the Sixth World. Magic rises, then falls away to nearly nothing, following an ages-old pattern. As the level of magic rises, so do the capabilities of magicians. There's more to work with, and more that can be done. And so the dangers increase, too.

"Certain things, certain beings, require a specific level of magic to exist. And certain things can only enter our world when magic here reaches a certain level. The problem is, the Great Ghost Dance raised the level of magic in this particular spot to a level far higher than anywhere else on the planet. It's higher here than it will be on most of the planet for a thousand years. And because of that, in a far too short amount of time, creatures from elsewhere in the metaplanes will be able to enter this world and destroy it."

He pauses and looks at the runners. His voice carries an earnest note that's hard to mistake. He is not exaggerating.

"They've had other names, but let's just call them the Enemy. All they want is to destroy and consume; they don't care about anything else. Not all of them are mindless, though. In fact, some of them are quite brilliant. If things had followed their natural course and the Enemy didn't arrive for a couple thousand years, mankind actually might have stood a chance. By then, magic and technology would have become powerful allies. In past ages, when the Enemy came, people either fought and died or hid and hoped to survive. But 2,000 years from now, I believe mankind would have been capable of holding its own.

"But the Enemy capable of entering our world now could survive and ravage the planet. They need a certain magic level to get in, but most of them could survive easily without it once they're here. We'd have no hope against them. We couldn't even hide with the magic we have now. Only the fraggin' dragons would have any hope of living through it. This place, this level of magic right here, will soon be high enough for the Enemy to slip through. And if that happens, we're all dead."

He pauses. "I'm serious. If they slip in, the planet and everybody on it is dead. We've got to stop it. We have no choice."

HOOKS

Again, *weird* is the key concept here. According to the laws of nature, the runners should not all fit in the back of the minivan, but they do. Equally as strange, Harlequin's traveling companion is Jane "Frosty" Foster (the runners may recognize her from previous encounters with the elf) and this odd conglomeration is apparently road-tripping through the desert. Just let this scene play itself out—there should be enough going on to thoroughly confuse the players.

The bare, almost featureless spot in the desert is the site of the Great Ghost Dance, and the place radiates both power and majesty. This locale should be eerie and dead quiet. It serves as a crossroads of the metaplanes, overwhelming in its scale and implications. Beyond describing the area, the gamemaster doesn't need to do much to set the mood. The runners should quickly figure out the significance of the site on their own.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The astral quest has begun. Officially, it begins when the runners pass the Dweller on the Threshold, but that ritual is a mere technicality here (even the Dweller knows it). Remember that from this point on, all the adventures take place entirely in astral space. It may look like the real world, it may even hurt like the real world, but it is something completely different.

Though **Harlequin's Back** is an astral quest, this adventure does not use the standard **Shadowrun** rules for such a journey (pp. 93–97 of the **Grimoire, Second Edition**). Harlequin represents the primary motivating force of the quest (though the runners must complete it for him) and having been raised and taught magic in a different age, his view of the metaplanes is different from the modern (circa 2055) view. Many of the principles are the same, but the questor does not simply move from Place to Place until he or she finally reaches the Citadel. Harlequin's metaphysical understanding of things is much less linear than that, and it is his view that matters. (Yes, this does mean that a character's world view shapes how magic works for him in the **Shadowrun** universe.)

Resolve all encounters on this astral quest using roleplaying rules. The players should handle events as if their characters were really involved in physical encounters. Resist the temptation to allow the characters to resolve encounters with a few simple die rolls; these events hold far too much importance to the survival of their world for the player characters to get off that easy. The player characters must play out events for themselves.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The quest begins as indicated in the first **Tell it to Them Straight** entry. Though the runners do not know it, they are approaching the Dweller on the Threshold. (NEVER explain to the players exactly what is going on during **Harlequin's Back.** Let them figure things out for themselves.) The environment in this part of the astral quest is very limited. Any character who attempts to leave the road and enter the forest reappears on the other side of the road. Astral perception shows the same view of the environment. Spellcasting works, but the spells have no effect. Guns and other pieces of technology also do not work, though characters with cyberware will not feel hampered in any manner. No nature spirits answer a shaman's call here, and any elementals a hermetic mage may have on call appear but tell the magician that they

are "forbidden to reveal what is happening." They also refuse to answer any questions, regardless of the magician's ability to compel them. A character who attempts to walk the other way down the road eventually reaches a curve that takes him to the edge of the river. The runners cannot avoid the Dweller.

These characteristics apply to the area around the boat dock and the short boat ride as well. Any actions the players take bring them back to the dock or the boat.

At the dock, the runners encounter the Dweller in the guise of the robed figure. When the figure moves, the runners hear the sound of dry leaves rustling. After the figure beckons the runners to the boat, it speaks. Each runner hears the voice of a long-dead loved one (this scene is most effective if each runner feels some guilt about that individual's demise).

"Welcome to this place Beyond," it says in its frighteningly familiar voice. "You may come no further until you have been judged worthy."

At this point, a particularly savvy player character may realize that this is an astral quest. If the characters do not realize the nature of their surroundings now, they should soon. As soon as it hits them, the players are bound to point out two things. First, if this is an astral quest why are the mundanes present? Good question—do not answer it. Second, why can't they stop the quest and return to their bodies? Another good question with no answer. (The answers have to do with the ritual Harlequin performed to involve them in the quest. The ritual lies beyond the runners' understanding and Harlequin's natural ability—he performed it at the real location of the Great Ghost Dance, using the higher magic level there—and should remain a mystery.)

The Dweller now calls each of the runners by name—their *real* names, not the silly street names they go by. He also brands them by naming some particularly nefarious deed they have performed. If necessary, consult the answers provided to the short questionnaire from **Foreshadows**, p. 16, for something damning. Give all the runners equal treatment, equal time, equal embarrassment. (If the runners try, they cannot defeat the Dweller, individually or collectively. Any character who attempts to do so is dumped unceremoniously in the river and plucked out again, dripping wet, to stand back among his comrades.)

Next, the Dweller tests each runner. The gamemaster should choose one skill or Attribute that exemplifies the character and come up with some test that shows the character's ability in that area. Resolve a test of that skill or Attribute (no Dice Pools of any kind apply) against a Target Number 15. Astrally active players may remember that the target number for this test is usually the Quest Rating and should sensibly be afraid. Note any successes each character generates on this test. Multiply the number of successes by 3 to calculate the character's personal Karma Pool for the duration of the astral quest. The players do not know it yet, but their characters do not have their normal personal Karma Pool *or* their normal Team Karma Pool for these adventures. The points they get here are the only personal Karma Pool points they get. (For more information, see **Harlequin's Gift**, p. 26 in the following chapter.)

Normally, characters who fail the Dweller's test return to their bodies and cannot participate in the quest. Not so in this case. If a character fails the test—and it's likely most will—the Dweller simply regards him or her silently and then says, "Despite your failure, despite the fact that you are not worthy of the tasks before you, despite the fact that you are not worthy of the companionship of those who have succeeded, I am forbidden to deny you passage." Again, player characters may know this is simply wrong under standard quest rules, but the Dweller offers no explanation. (The Great Powers are interested in this quest, and they have decreed that all the runners shall pass. Though he doesn't really know it, Harlequin has friends in high places on this trip.)

Once all the runners have been humiliated, tested, and perhaps humiliated again, they enter the boat. It rocks precariously as they climb aboard, especially if the team includes any troll or ork runners. Once the runners settle themselves onto the tiny benches, the Dweller glides behind them to the rear of the boat and steers it away from the dock. Read the players the third section under **Tell It to Them Straight**.

The runners cannot interact with the female figure who appears on the dock as they leave. This is Fate, weaving the final threads to send the player characters off on their quest. The runners will not know this, of course, but they might guess.

ROAD TRIP

After the boat fades away, the runners find themselves sitting in exactly the same positions in Harlequin's minivan. Luckily, the air conditioning is working.

The minivan is only a representation of the group's journey. Like the road in the previous scene, the minivan is a limited environment. Any actions the runners may take bring them back to the seats in the minivan.

Here, Harlequin wears a T-shirt emblazoned with the image from the cover of the Pink Floyd album *Dark Side of the Moon*. (For those of you not familiar with the artwork, it depicts a prism with a single ray of white light entering on the left side and radiating as a prismatic spray on the other side.) A pair of faded jeans, cowboy boots, and the Brooklyn Dodgers cap complete his clothing. A beaten up denim jacket is draped across the back of his seat. It has no adornments, except for a small yin-yang pin.

Jane "Frosty" Foster is riding shotgun. Bracelets on her wrists and a pendant that hangs down under her shirt look like they might be foci. She remains aloof from the conversation unless the runners ask her direct questions. Otherwise she keeps silent and watches the desert pass by.

The minivan itself is a fairly nondescript vehicle with gray carpet, blue fabric seats, a radio that plays any station the passengers might desire, and working air conditioning. The cigarette lighter does not work. The glove compartment contains nothing, but on the dashboard sits a small, suede-textured figure of a German shepherd, whose head bounces up and down

on a spring as the van travels along. The vehicle's doors cannot be opened, and the runners cannot exit the minivan.

If none of the runners offers a cigarette lighter, Harlequin conjures a small burst of flame to light the cigarette that hangs in his mouth. If any of the runners complains about the smoke, he ignores them. The windows do not open but the air conditioner does a decent job of keeping the air moving. Unfortunately, it also tends to blow most of the smoke into the rear of the van.

When Harlequin talks, he is agitated and rambling. He talks a lot and speaks rather quickly, because, truthfully, he's a little scared. It's been ages since he was called on to perform anything like what he and the runners are about to attempt, and he is worried that he's out of practice. Such tasks may have been commonplace in his youth, but now ... If you need a model for his behavior, think of a high-strung, sarcastic comedian on a verbal tear.

If any of the runners try to ask him questions after he speaks his piece, Harlequin waves them off. If they persist, he scowls at them and says, "Look, I can answer the questions now that I'll answer later anyway, or I can concentrate on driving this thing. Trust me, this is not the kind of place where you want to get lost." Jane Foster has fallen asleep by now and remains that way until the van reaches the site of the Great Ghost Dance or the runners deliberately wake her.

If they wake her, Jane can answer some questions, though she's not willing to really say much, considering Harlequin himself is sitting right there. All she really knows is that the group of them are on some great astral quest to take care of some "problem." Harlequin has not told her the specific nature of the problem, and she's unwilling to speculate (though she has a pretty good idea of what's going on). She doesn't know exactly where the van is headed, which could be anywhere, considering that they're driving in astral space. (Again, she has a reasonable idea about where she thinks they're headed, but lacks the confidence to trust her own research and instincts.) She can't explain why the runners were chosen. She can tell them that she and Harlequin initially planned to recruit fellow questors themselves, but it quickly became apparent that someone or something else was making their choices for them. She'll add, "Like he says, when the universe taps you on the shoulder, you listen—and you try and stay out of its way."

Time passes; the player characters can do little, and Harlequin will not talk to them right now.

SHALL WE DANCE?

If any of the runners enters the actual area of the Great Ghost Dance—the flattened, barren circle of land, about 20 meters in diameter, described at the end of **Tell It to Them Straight**—he or she immediately senses the power present. The Dance was effectively "blood magic"—people died willingly to fuel the magic, and the echoes from that sacrifice can still be felt. Mundanes experience the echoes as lightheadedness and agitation. Magicians experience much more—double a character's Magic Attribute if he or she is a shaman, halve it if not.

Unlike the road leading to the Dweller, or the minivan, this site is a "real" place. Technology and forms of magic work here. Astrally perceiving (an odd thought, considering the runners' location) subjects a magician to an overwhelming blast of emotion and power. Any magician looking into the astral must make a Willpower Test to resist an attack of 5D Stun. No Dice Pool of any kind can affect this test. Any Stun damage taken is recovered at a rate of about 1 box per minute. The sensation is not permanently damaging, just overpowering.

Other than the flatness and barrenness of the area, nothing indicates that this is the site of the greatest exercise of magic in the modern era.

After Harlequin's ominous spiel, the runners no doubt will ask plenty of questions. Answer them as best you can using the information presented here. A couple of likely questions and Harlequin's answers follow:

Why us? "Got me, kid. Like I said, *I* didn't pick you, Lady Luck did. Thank *her* when you see her."

What can we do? "I've got some ideas on that, but we gotta go elsewhere to take care of business."

Can we warn anyone? "I did. Most of them didn't believe me. Not that I'm surprised, they were always a fairly self-centered lot."

Can I go home now? "Nope, we're all here for the long haul, like it or not."

How powerful is the Enemy? "Individually, they vary in power from total punks to dragonslayers. Some have already been summoned or slipped through. That's the way it goes. The problem is that when the rest come, they come like an army. A huge, un-fraggin'-stoppable army."

Are the bugs the Enemy? "The *invae?* Not hardly. Just a pesky nuisance, those things. The Enemy aren't true spirits like the bugs. They're much more physical. The bugs also need a minimum level of magic before they can be summoned, but the Great Ghost Dance only accelerated their appearance by a couple hundred years. Not that they're much of a threat anymore." (This question assumes that some player characters know about the insect spirits as presented in the **Shadowrun** adventures **Universal Brotherhood, Queen Euphoria,** and **Double Exposure.**)

Once Harlequin has answered some questions, the silver ball lighting the area begins to flicker. The elf looks up at it, winces and says, "Okay, time to cross over. Everybody circle around me." As the runners gather around, the ball drops down level with the elf's head and then disappears, plunging the area back into darkness.

"Let's see what we're up against," Harlequin says, and suddenly it's day.

DEBUGGING

Again, little can go wrong here. This scene leaves the player characters little leeway to stray from the events as presented. Move on to **The Bridge, Part One,** p. 22.

THE BRIDGE, PART ONE

OVERVIEW

In this section, the runners get their first glimpse of the Enemy. Harlequin takes them to the Chasm and the Bridge to see the progress the Enemy has made in spanning the gulf to our world. Harlequin tells the player characters the story of Thayla's Song and what they must do to bring the Songbird to the Chasm. When the Enemy somehow attacks from *this* side of the Chasm, the runners must repel the attack and begin their quest.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read this to the players immediately following the conclusion of *Into the Desert*:

The light is blinding, brighter than the noonday sun. The air is dry and harsh, and a stiff wind blows hot against your faces. You blink, cough, and realize that the desert seems very different. Where before the scrub-covered ground was broken and rocky, it's now flat, parched, and cracked. Then you realize no sun hangs overhead; the sky itself throws a bright, colorless light down on everything.

One of you gasps, and the rest turn. Two impossibly deep pits lie on either side of you. You cannot see the far side or the bottom of either. You stand on a narrow strip of land some hundred meters across that stretches away from you between the two pits almost to the horizon. Nearly lost in the haze of distance, you think you can make out something.

You all stare at this sight, slack jawed and speechless for long minutes, until you realize that Harlequin has set off down the stretch of land, Jane Foster following a few steps behind. He waves at you to catch up, and you do.

After a pause, read the following:

You follow the elf for some time. A small part of your mind, perhaps the last rational piece, wonders how much time has passed as you've walked. Hours? Days? Years? Then, in the haze far ahead of you, your destination appears, and you realize that you haven't been walking between two pits. You see that you are on a huge outcropping of rock that juts kilometers out over a chasm—a chasm whose bottom you cannot see. The ground grows broken and rocky, and you must climb through the treacherous terrain for the last few hundred meters. As you reach the end of the rugged ground and top a small crest, you look down on an unbelievable scene.

The outcropping ends abruptly, and beyond it lies a wide open space and roaring wind. The far side of the Chasm is barely visible, but you can make out what looks like a bridge stretching away from the land on that side. The dark construction is already kilometers long, lancing out across the Chasm, and a horde of beings swarm over it. You cannot quite identify them, but whatever they are, they are building at a feverish pace, like so many ants.

"They're coming, you see," Harlequin says, shouting against the roar of the wind. "And the Great Ghost Dance, this outcropping, has made it thousands of years easier for them."

Read the following when the Enemy attacks:

Harlequin yells and you turn and see something clambering over the rocks. At first you mistake the creatures for giant spiders, but then you see what you had taken for legs are actually long, furred tentacles. Then you realize that the black, furred, armored bodies of the beasts had once been human. The creatures' heads have sunk into their shoulders, and long tails whip behind them as they scuttle over the rocks, low to the ground.

The six foul things see you and suddenly leap, bridging dozens of meters in a fraction of a second. Their terrible stench reaches you a heartbeat before they do.

HOOKS

This landscape represents metaphysical phenomena. The Chasm is the gap of time and metaspace the Enemy must cross to reach our world. The outcropping, shooting more than two-thirds of the way across, represents the Great Ghost Dance. This is a place of grand power and mysticism, a place where the fate of the world hangs in the balance. This place is neither calm nor simple.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The dark ground is mottled with blacks, browns, and grays. The flat earth is parched and cracked and sustains no life, plant or animal. On three sides of the outcropping lie the Chasm, a bottomless hole of blackness that seems to descend to the very beginning of time itself. A fierce wind roars from its depths, and the sky overhead is filled with churning black clouds that occasionally break to reveal a violet so deep that it's hard to look at.

The runners may possess any of their usual gear when they materialize on the outcropping, and it all functions normally. They cannot carry all their gear, however, so determine what equipment each player character seems to use most often and supply them with those items. Deckers may have their decks, and riggers can command one small drone. All other gear, spells, and foci appear and function normally.

Make the trek across the outcropping seem dreamlike. The players should sense time passing as they walk, but be unable to judge hours or minutes. In fact, make the characters feel as if they have journeyed forever. Let the players think they are walking across a strip of land till they reach the Chasm edge, then reveal the land to be an outcropping.

A stretch of torn and broken ground marks the end of the outcropping. The debris rises three to four times the height of a troll, and the characters must climb over it, carefully and slowly. After a small rise near the end of the outcropping, the broken ground gives way to a flat area, maybe 20 or 30 meters across. Then the ground drops away into the infinite depths of the Chasm.

Across the Chasm, the runners can barely see the far side. The rock face seems the same as what they have just crossed, but no details are visible except for the bridge being constructed toward the outcropping. The player characters cannot identify the swarms (hundreds? thousands? millions?) of figures performing the construction, but their continuous progress is immediately apparent, even from this distance. It will only be a matter of time before the bridge spans the Chasm.

Harlequin allows the runners a few moments to absorb the scene. "This is the heart of reality, where intention and potential take physical form, where desire is manifest and things are everything that they seem and more.

"As you can see, the Enemy is coming," he says as he points to the barely visible framework of the bridge. "It's being made of the bones and spirit of their own kind and those they've vanquished. Normally, they'd wait for the two sides of the Chasm to grow naturally closer, as they will over time and as the magic level of our world rises. But they can see the outcropping, and they know what it means."

The player characters will probably have some questions at this point. The following paragraphs outline everything Harlequin is willing to say about the Enemy and what is going on. Paraphrase answers to the characters based on this information. Harlequin shrugs off questions he is unwilling or unable to answer. Certain bits of this information also appear in other parts of this book for easy reference.

HARLEQUIN'S ANSWERS

The Enemy comes from another place in the metaplanes that Harlequin cannot identify. He also cannot say whether this place is real, imaginary, symbolic, or physical. The Enemy can pass into our world during a window of opportunity near the peak of the mana cycle. That cycle will peak in about 2,500 years, with the Enemy's window occurring roughly 300 years on either side of the apex.

The Enemy comprises primarily physical creatures, not spirits in the sense that 21st-century people use the term. Many different kinds of creatures make up the horde, most with unique powers and abilities. These highly magical, terribly vicious creatures lack any remorse, pity, conscience, or care. They exist solely to consume. The more primitive ones consume physical matter—rocks, soil, trees, animals, flesh. The more intelligent and powerful creatures—the truly dangerous ones—seek to consume less tangible things like emotions, pain, desire, hopes, and fears. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of these vile creatures exist. (Meta)human civilization has never successfully stood against them, though modern technology might have bettered the odds—in another two millennia or so. In 2055, however, humankind doesn't stand a chance.

Some of the Enemy have already entered the world, through smaller, temporary spikes in the magic level. Some have been called across through summoning rituals performed by ignorant fools. Most of those fools have paid dearly for their arrogance. For now, only a few, perhaps a score, of the Enemy exist in the world of 2055. Note that the insect spirits, the *invae*, are not the Enemy, though these creatures come into our world in a similar manner. In fact, the Enemy will gleefully consume all the bugs they can find when the time comes.

Harlequin tells the player characters that only one way exists to stop the Enemy from crossing the Chasm early—rendering the outcropping unusable for them. And he believes he knows how to do just that.

Thayla's Voice

Harlequin tells the runners a story to explain his plan for stopping the Enemy. (The tale is duplicated on page 152 in the **Player Handouts** section for convenience.) The elf's voice and manner seem very distant and distracted as he tells the story.

Ages ago, before written memory began, lived a queen of great beauty and even greater heart. Thayla reigned over a rich green valley nestled between two mountain ranges that rose like spikes into the heavens. Under her rule, the land she loved prospered, and her people lived their days in joy.

Each morning, Thayla greeted the rising sun with a Song. She sang in a voice as clear as the air and as bright as the great burning orb itself. Nothing foul or dark could prosper in her land, for her voice was too pure for such abominations to bear.

One night, an army of dark creatures made to enter the valley, seeking to overrun the prosperous land and corrupt it with their vile presence. Thayla rose that morning as she always did, and upon seeing the black army, sang. Her voice filled the valley with power and hope.

The evil horde, shown the depravity of their existence by her voice, had no choice but to flee. And as they did—running and flying with wild abandon for refuge beyond the valley—one black soldier slowed and, for the briefest of moments, listened to Thayla's Song.

Days passed, and the terrible army remained beyond the valley, fearful of the Song. Finally, driven by their dark masters, they surged forward again. And again Thayla sang.

As before, the foul creatures fell back blindly, unable to stand even a few pure notes of her voice. But again the lone, tall warrior with hair and eyes of dark fire lingered and listened, if only for a few moments, before fleeing the valley.

The next time the creatures approached Thayla's domain, less of the army came. The rest were unable to marshal the will needed to enter the valley. But again, the lone dark soldier fell back last, so that he could hear her Song.

Finally, not one of the black army would come. Not even the terrible threats of their vile masters could push them for-

ward. But still a single warrior in ebony and red armor would slip into the valley before each dawn and listen, and after a time, watch as well.

The black figure advanced to where he could see Thayla standing high upon the terraces of the great sprawling city that surrounded her palace. And he would watch her every morning, as she rose and greeted the new day with the Song. And as he listened, blood flowed from his ears and his skin blistered from the powerful purity of her voice, but he would not turn aside. He would not flee from her Song. And so he stood, listened, and watched.

Then one night, the dark warrior slipped into the city as Thayla slept. He crept into her citadel, sat at the foot of her bed and watched her.

When she woke and found him there, she called for her guards, but none were strong enough to move the dark warrior. She called her sorcerers, but none were wise enough to banish him. She sang to drive him away, but though his body and spirit were wracked with pain, he stood strong and firm, enraptured by her beauty.

Unable to drive him away, the great Queen Thayla decided to ignore him. Though he stood at her side, she ate without speaking to him. Though he ran alongside as she took her horses out for exercise, she did not look at him. And though he stood silently nearby as she slept, she did not acknowledge his presence.

Each morning, she would rise and greet the sun, singing loud and strong so that the dark army waiting beyond the valley could not enter. And each morning, he stood beside her and cried tears of blood and fire at the pain and joy her voice gave him.

And so this went on for some time. Thayla slept, sang, and performed her royal duties. But the black warrior stayed at her side, and slowly the land began to darken from his presence. The animals of the field sickened, as did the people. The crops would not grow, and dark and terrible clouds filled the sky over the valley.

Thayla knew the black soldier was the cause of all these things, and so she asked him to leave. He did not even answer her. She tried to trick him into leaving, but he would not be fooled. Then she tried to force him away, but he could not be broken. Finally, she begged him to leave.

"But I do not wish to leave," he replied. These were the first words he had ever spoken to her, and his voice was like dried leaves blown on the autumn wind. "Your beauty is like none I have ever seen."

"But you cannot stay," she told him. "Your presence is destroying my land and my people."

"I care not for your land or its people," the warrior told her. "I care only for you."

Faced with his determination, Thayla wept. Slowly her people died. Finally, she called her greatest advisors together and told them what they must do.

"As you know, the presence of the dark warrior is destroying our land and our people," she said. "However, he will not leave my side. We cannot make him leave, and so *I* must leave the land and take him with me."

Her advisors wailed at her words. "But you cannot! It is only your voice that holds the black army at bay! If you leave, we will certainly die!"

Thayla nodded, for she knew this to be true, but said, "I will leave, but my voice will remain." And with that she charged her most powerful sorcerers with the task of placing her voice in a songbird that would greet the rising sun each morning as she had.

They searched the land and found the finest songbird of all. And as the sun rose, they performed the ritual. When the first light appeared the next morn, the bird sang with Thayla's Voice, and the Song held the dark army at bay.

The sorcerers rejoiced at this, but when they turned to congratulate Thayla, she and her dark shadow had gone. They searched the land but could find neither of them.

But the Songbird rose each morning. And with a voice as pure as the clear air itself, it sang the Song, and the black army trembled in its tracks, unable to enter the valley.

At this point, Harlequin pauses for a long time. He stares across the Chasm at the Bridge and its terrible engineers, and a vague sense of uneasiness fills the air. Finally, he turns back to the runners and says, "I believe if we can bring the Songbird here, the Enemy will not be able to stand against Thayla's Voice. You have to find the Voice, though it will not be an easy task. I must remain here and prepare this place for the Songbird.

"You worry about knowing where to go—Fate will guide you. But you must be observant and cunning in each of the places you visit. For what you must do will not always be obvious, and it will often be steeped in symbolism and metaphor. Draw on every experience you have ever had—remember everything you are told, everything you dream, everything that happens to you and around you. The most inconsequential things may hold dire importance. You must do more than look and listen, you must *see*.

"I do not know precisely what you will need to do, except that it will somehow be related to what we are attempting here. You must find a way to bring Thayla's Voice back here. The Song, Queen Thayla, the Songbird, the Enemy—they may manifest in many forms, in many guises, so you must stay aware. ... " His voice trails off as he stares beyond the runners toward the broken terrain behind them. Suddenly the elf points and shouts, "*To the rear!*"

As the runners turn, read the players the final section under **Tell It to Them Straight,** p. 22.

THE ENEMY STRIKES

This first attack of the Enemy uses creatures that neither the runners nor Harlequin have ever encountered. These creatures are unique, terrible magical constructs of the Enemy. Technically, they were "built" millennia ago, but they now breed by infecting host bodies and changing them.

The creatures are fast and powerful, but this fight is designed to frighten the player characters, not to defeat them. Frighten them *bad*. Feel free to fudge numbers to ensure none of the player characters die here (ah, the true value of a gamemaster's screen).

Determine Initiative per standard rules; no surprise situation exists. Two of the six creatures attack Harlequin immediately. He has no magics prepared (assume he has an unprepared Initiative of 8). Roll for the creatures' attacks and then roll a large handful of dice for Harlequin's Damage Resistance Test. (Note that Harlequin has no game statistics; in this adventure he serves as a plot device to push the story and the runners in the right direction. He should not be permanently harmed in this fight, and so resolving all the usual tests serves no purpose. But let the players worry that Harlequin may be killed, which would leave them on their own.)

Harlequin goes down hard, twitching and frothing, as a result of the double attack. He's not dead—not even close—but force the runners to use some healing magic on him after the fight (see below).

Enemy Crawlers (4)

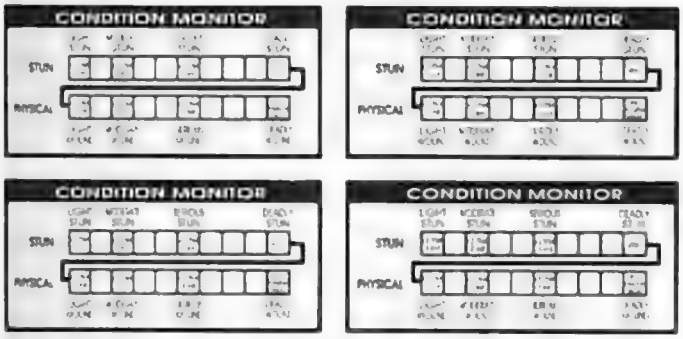
B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R	Armor
10	8 x 5	12	6	8	6	(6)	7	8/10

Initiative: 7 + 4D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Attacks: 3

Tentacle Attack (x 2): Melee Combat Attack Dice = 13, Damage = 12M Stun

Mouth Bite/Venom (if both tentacles hit): Melee Combat Attack Dice = 13, Damage = Every 2 net Melee Combat successes reduce the victim's Reaction by 1. Success may be offset by the victim's Melee Combat successes, per standard rules, and by a standard Damage Resistance Test. Reaction reduction wears off at the rate of 1 point per minute after the fight has ended. Any Reaction reductions affect cyberware, bioware, and magical bonuses to Reaction as well.

Notes: The creatures move quickly across the ground or by leaping (distance traveled is the same, leaping is just more impressive). They make no noise.



Make it hard, but not impossible, for the runners to deal with the creatures. If the fight proves too tough for the player characters, reduce the creatures' Threat Ratings to more manageable levels. The creatures have no Damage overflow, so once they're dead, they're dead, and they vaporize in burning, twisting sprays of ash. Any creatures knocked unconscious do the same after a few minutes.

Regardless of what seemed to have happened, Harlequin is alive and recovering after the fight, though the runners need to assist him with healing magic or some sort of technological medical aid. (For the purposes of any Heal or Treat spells the runners use, Harlequin's Essence is effectively an 8. Do not explain this, merely provide it as information. Harlequin himself will not answer any questions on the subject.)

Use of healing magic leaves Harlequin better, but still weak. However, he is now forewarned.

THE GATE

After the attack, Harlequin begins to create a mystical gateway to send the runners on their way. He tells them that because they are already in the metaplanes, the creation of the gate is simply a traditional ritual, used to mark the beginning of quest, and a gesture he believes appropriate.

That said, he walks over to the flat side of a large rock, removes a huge piece of chalk from the pocket of his coat and begins to draw on the rock (as he does so, Jane Foster quietly says to one of the runners, "He usually uses the chalk to play hopscotch on the sidewalk."). After a minute or two, Harlequin's drawing begins to resemble a door.

If a player character with astral perception uses it to examine the drawing, he or she sees that Harlequin is inscribing the door with lines of force—apparently nothing powerful. In fact, the enchanting doesn't even seem to have a purpose. (It may be completely symbolic, just as Harlequin said.)

His work takes hours, and he graciously refuses any assistance, including any offered by Jane Foster, who grows more and more nervous. (Jane refuses to talk about the source of her anxiety—Harlequin's taught her much but kept her fairly sheltered. She has never tested his instruction and is concerned that the elf intends to send her off with the group without even an explanation, let alone more information than they have.)

Once Harlequin completes the doorway—an ornate, filigreed design created with excruciating detail—he brushes the chalk dust from his hands, flips the small piece of chalk remaining to one of the runners and begins to address them.

"It's ready for use," he says. "Before you head off, you need to know a few final things. Each Place you go, the rules will differ. Your equipment may or may not arrive with you, your magic may not work the same. For all I know, you may not even be yourselves in some of those Places. But no matter what happens, no matter what you see, always remember the Place is causing the changes. No matter what you have, no matter what you are carrying, no matter what your options, your sharpest weapon will always be your wit and cunning. Pay attention, listen, look for the patterns, see beyond the obvious. If you don't, you may fail and be lost out there forever.

"Now, you will also meet things ... "

At this point, a second wave of creatures attack. Any guards the runners have posted see the creatures advancing. If the runners have not posted guards, Harlequin's voice trails off and he finishes his sentence by saying, " ... more often than you'd like."

Initially the runners see six of the same creatures as before. Let the players begin to plan a defense. Then a dozen of the creatures appear. And then more. At this point,

Harlequin's face becomes very dark as the shapes of other things begin to move among the rocks.

If the runners participated in the first **Harlequin** adventure, Harlequin turns to them now and says, "My sword, if you please." (He is referring to the ornate sword thrown to one of the shadowrunners at the end of that adventure. He knows full well that its only value was monetary, but he's decided to yank the runners' chains.) When the runners' only reply is a blank stare, Harlequin clutches at his heart and says, "You didn't bring my sword? Do you have any idea what it was?" He pauses, waiting for an answer (the Enemy continues to close). Then Harlequin winks, saying, "It's okay, I have another one."

A flash of magical energy among the rocks grabs his attention. He waves the runners toward the door in the rock. "Go!" he yells. "Go quickly! A sorcerer stands among them, and he will try to break the gate!" Harlequin begins to walk toward the approaching creatures. As he does, wisps of what seems to be water vapor swirl toward him and begin to wrap around his body, forming bright, almost crystalline armor.

By this time, the runners should be moving toward the rock door. If any of them hesitates, staring at the chalk doorway, Harlequin yells, "Open it, you bloody fool!" as Jane Foster steps up and pulls it open. The chalk door opens just like a regular door, except that it is two-dimensional (it has no depth). Once the door is open, a dry hot breeze comes through. Jane immediately steps through the doorway.

A flash of deep green lightning strikes Harlequin, forking as it hits and rebounding into the rocks. The elf curses as dozens of crawling creatures surge over the rocks. Turning toward the runners, Harlequin cuts his right palm with the nails of his left, drawing blood. As the runners dart through the door, he snaps his right hand toward them, spraying them with his blood. The droplets strike the runners and they all feel a warm shot of power rush through them. "My luck goes with you!" he cries.

As the runners pass through the doorway, they see dozens of crawling creatures rushing toward Harlequin and the doorway, and behind those creatures, larger, fatter things that flash with dull green energy. Harlequin is walking toward the creatures. The white and blue crystalline armor is formed nearly solid around him, and in quick succession three globes of energy surround him and contract, wrapping around his body and fading from view. Finally, as the last runner enters the doorway, Harlequin snaps his right arm and wrist to the side, and a long, thin-bladed sword with an ornate hilt appears in his hand. The blade gleams with a light all its own, and rivulets of fire erupt where the blood from his hand runs along it. Then the creatures descend on him and the lightning strikes again. ...

Blackness lies behind the doorway, and then the runners slowly arrive in another Place entirely. ...

HARLEQUIN'S GIFT

Harlequin's statement of "My luck goes with you!" was more than mere drama. Each of the runners already has a personal Karma Pool with a number of points determined by each character's encounter with the Dweller in **Into the Desert**, p. 20. Those are the only personal Karma Pool points they have for the entire adventure of **Harlequin's Back**.

Thanks to Harlequin, they also have a Team Karma Pool of 50 points. All the standard rules for Team Karma Pools apply, *except* that the points from this pool do not return once they've been spent. They are gone for good, regardless of whether the runners deliberately burn the points for automatic successes. Do not reveal the nature or amount of this pool until after the players have spent some points.

DEBUGGING

Again, little can go wrong here. Balance the initial encounter with the Enemy's creatures to make it challenging but not deadly. If any of the runners take the big dive, Harlequin invokes some heavy juju to restore them to life. Give the player characters a good scare, but do not maim them.

Dissuade any runners who stay and try to fight the second wave of creatures. If one or more of them tries to do this, Harlequin fires a concussion-blast spell to knock them through the door. Let them try to resist the attack all they want—fudge the roll result if necessary, and blow their willful little hoops into the next scene.

From here, go to the first adventure, **Aftermath**, p. 27.

AFTERMATH

"The great peaks of honor we had forgotten—Duty, Patriotism, and—clad in glittering white—the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven."

—Earl Lloyd-George, London, September 19, 1914

OVERVIEW

The runners find themselves in a post-apocalyptic Pacific Northwest, in an area they may recognize as what used to be Seattle. The nature of what destroyed the area, or how long ago it happened, is never made clear. Here they encounter the Enclave, a survival community in trouble. Time and the difficulty of making it through each day have taken their toll on the area and the population, and it seems unlikely they will survive on their own much longer. Apparently, their only hope lies with another community known as the Collective, located several hours' journey away. The Collective is not exactly a saving grace, however, as its people seem to want only conquest, not cooperation.

Because this is the first Place on the player characters' quest, they may be surprised to see Harlequin's familiar face in the form of Leroy, leader of the Enclave. Technically speaking, Leroy is not Harlequin—they simply share many common attributes and aspects. Observant players gain insights into Harlequin's nature by observing Leroy and others like him they meet during their quest. Likewise, Talia represents Thayla, who is willing to sacrifice herself for her people. The similarity of names alone should be enough of a clue for the runners to make the connection. If they fail to recognize her from that clue, it's okay—they'll get a few more chances to make the right connections.

Eventually, the runners meet this Place's manifestation of Darke as Oscuro, leader of the Collective. Oscuro holds the item they need to obtain in this Place, a leather hood for the Songbird.

WASTELAND

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The heat hits you like a physical blow—like the breath of a blast furnace or a summer breeze from Hell. You can actually feel it sucking the moisture from your skin and throat. Wind-blown dust scours your eyes. Harsh, gritty sand shifts under your feet.

Where in the name of the Spirits *are* you? You look around, scoping out your surroundings.

You're standing on dusty ground. If asked to describe it, you'd probably call it a blasted plain, except it's not really a plain. It probably *used* to be a plain, before some seismic nastiness wrinkled it like a synthsilk shirt dried on high heat. Now blighted by parallel ravines, each about ten meters wide and slightly deeper and separated by knife-edge ridges, artistically it's a dramatic locale—but not a place to spend any time.

The land slopes gradually upward toward mountains in the distance. No—*volcanoes*, three of them, spaced almost evenly along the horizon. *Active* volcanoes at that, all topped with sullen fire, belching thick plumes of smoke and solid particles into the hot, dry air. Between you and the distant fiery mountains lie foothills of naked, blackened rock. And in the middle distance, something looks like a forest—but not the pure, pristine forests of the tribal lands surrounding Seattle. Even at this distance, this looks like a forest out of an elf's worst nightmare, dark and twisted and somehow innately *wrong*. Depressed by this blasted landscape, you turn your gaze to the skies, hoping for something better.

All you get is more disappointment. The sky is a roiling turmoil of clouds, churning like the vision of a special-effects wizard after a three-day bender. Billowing smog you assume is filled with poison, no doubt belched out in megaton quantities by the volcanoes, rolls so low you imagine you could touch it. Bolts of a sickly yellow lightning lick through the cloud masses. The heavy clouds give you the impression of twilight ... but there's an area near the zenith that's *marginally* brighter than the rest of the sky. That has to mark the position of the sun, doesn't it?

As you shift nervously from foot to foot, you finally notice that your clothes and gear feel strange. You look down.

Frag, *what's happened?* You're no longer wearing your familiar "business suits" covered with pockets and pouches bulging comfortably with extra clips, grenades, and other wizzer toys. Instead, you're wearing very fitted, very retro black leather jumpsuits. No armor, no hardened plates, just supple, glove-soft leather. Your retro-chic footwear's gone, too, replaced by lace-up combat boots. *Damn* it, you feel like refugees from an ancient, low-budget biker movie.

And what happened to your weapons? There's not a gun in sight, and you're also missing your personal explosives, your cell phones, your detonators, and every other tech toy you own. In their place, you find gear so primitive you've only ever seen it in flat-screen vid and old-fashioned paper books. Knives, mainly—and not even *good* knives. Not a monoblade or vibroblade among them. Just brutal chunks of metal, with hilts of wood (*wood!*) and bone, still bearing the impressions of the hammer blows that forged them. Knives, and projectile weapons you'd probably call crossbows except they don't have the stabilizers, recoil absorbers, and laser sights common to every crossbow you've ever used.

If any of the characters has cyberware, read the following:

And what the *frag* happened to your cyberware? You feel like you still have the advantages it gave you, but there's nary a piece of chrome in sight.

If the momentum of the runners' fight with the "alacorn" turns against them, read the following:

On your home turf, with your usual gear, you'd reduce this flying horse to dog food without breaking a sweat. Here? Unless you get *really* lucky, the fragger is going to use your chest cavity as a feedbag.

Something flashes through your peripheral vision. For a moment you fear that My Little Twisted Pony brought his friends. But then you realize what it was you saw.

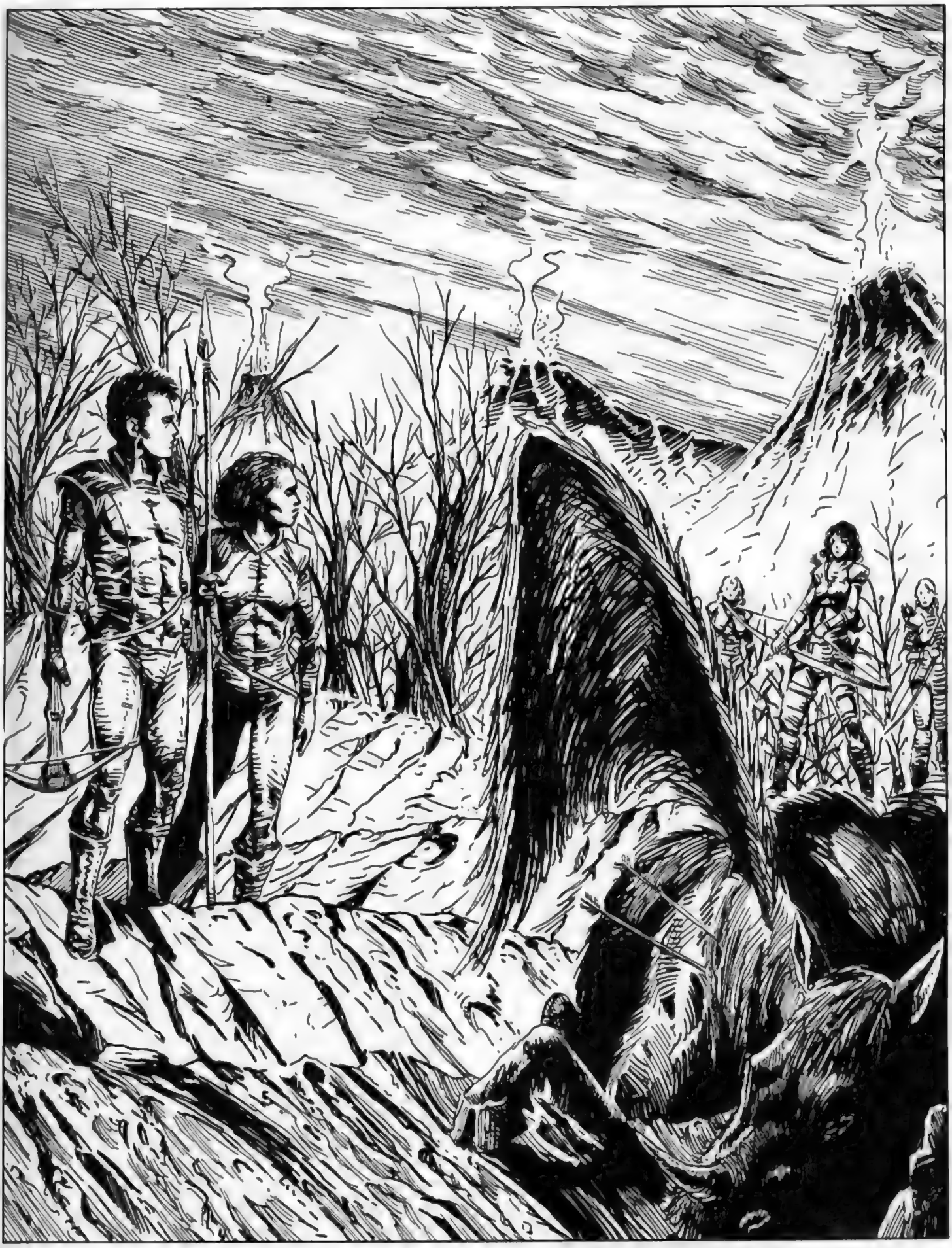
An arrow as long as your arm just flew past and buried itself fletching-deep in the horse's shoulder, followed by another one that whooshed by a centimeter from your head. The second arrow bites deep only a hand's-breadth from the first one. The winged horse throws back its head and it screams its agony at the clouds.

Once the alacorn is down, read the following:

As the winged horse collapses in a pool of its own blood, you turn your attention to your newfound allies.

Your three rescuers approach cautiously, giving you time to see that they're all female, all human, and all dressed much the same as you. All three carry simple recurve bows almost as tall as themselves—not the pulley-and-wire compound bows you're used to, but obviously efficient as hell. On their backs they wear quivers holding more of the sheaf arrows that did such a job on the horse.

The woman you guess to be oldest of the three lays her bow carefully on the ground, and—unarmed—steps toward you. "I am Maranda," she says, staring intently into your eyes. "Who are you, and where does your allegiance lie?"



HOOKS

The runners should get a distinct feeling of "I don't think we're in Kansas any more, Toto." This metaplane combines the familiar and the shockingly different, a combination tailor-made to create a vaguely nightmarish atmosphere. Unfamiliar dangers lurk over every rise—and perhaps in the clouds above—and the "ground rules" on which the runners usually depend (such as their edge of sorcery and cyberware) are no longer valid. Even when their apparent allies arrive, the runners continue to experience the nagging feeling that all is not quite what it seems.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The first thing the runners will notice, after taking in the particularly inhospitable landscape, is that they themselves have changed. They'd better get used to it fast, because this Place is sending a nasty test their way sooner than they expect.

CHARACTER MODIFICATIONS

The following rules suggest ways for the gamemaster to translate the characters' weapons, cyberware, and powers into appropriate equivalents for this world, and describe how magic works in this Place.

Weapons and Equipment

Feel free to lavishly embellish the fact that the runners possess only very primitive weapons. The gamemaster chooses the equipment each character now carries, keeping in mind one basic rule: no weapon exists in this Place that doesn't use muscle power, directly *or* indirectly, to do damage. Knives, swords (*not* katanas), axes, and clubs all appear in this Place, as do bows and crossbows (light or medium only; no high-tech compound or windlass-cocked heavy crossbows). And no firearms or explosives. Because these represent primitive versions of bows and crossbows (no composite materials here), reduce all Power Levels listed for these weapons by 1.

The runners must also get along without their other wizzer tech. The transition to this "netherworld" stripped them of all electronics and other tech toys. They have no communication devices (apart from their voices), no computers or cyberdecks, no laser range-finders, not even a piezoelectric cigarette lighter.

The runners also lost their armor. The leather clothes they wear offer an Armor Rating of 0/2. When they start feeling vulnerable, the runners might try to jury-rig armor for themselves; the gamemaster decides whether or not they succeed and determines the resulting armor ratings.

Cyberware and Bioware

The runners also lost their cyberware. The characters still possess most of the abilities and advantages normally created by their cyberware, but no evidence of the technology exists. In this Place, cyberware becomes the equivalent of a physical adept's special abilities. Characters retain any bonuses to ratings and other advantages conferred by internal cyber systems. Cyberware that affects the outside world (cyberguns, radios, and so on) ceases to exist. These same rules apply to bioware.

Unfortunately for them, though the runners must do without many of the wizzer features for which they paid precious Essence, their Essence Ratings on this metaplane remain the same as they were on the streets of Seattle. That said, the gamemaster should also base his decisions of what weapons, abilities, and advantages to give each character on the personalities of individual characters and players. "Power gamers" who measure success according to the amount of chrome they can jam into their characters' bodies might be outraged to find themselves reduced from the metallic gods of their everyday lives to the capabilities of "mere" off-the-rack humans. Because the main idea of playing **Shadowrun** is to have fun, gamemasters should temper their decisions with a sensitivity to what players will accept.

Magic

This metaplane affects magic in three distinct ways: spellcasting works differently, summoning offers a few quirks, and when assensed astrally, the environment of this Place looks even nastier—more scourged and twisted—than it does in normal sight.

CONJURING DRAIN TABLE

Spirit's Force Rating	Drain Level
Less than half shaman's Charisma	(M) Physical
Shaman's Charisma or less	(S) Physical
Greater than shaman's Charisma	(D) Physical

On this metaplane, spellcasting works in a slightly different fashion than on earth. The runners won't know about these differences until they actually try casting spells. Some consequences of this modified mana-flow they'll probably *never* understand and will certainly never master. However, the natives of this Place understand exactly how magic works here, and some inhabitants have mastered the techniques of spellcasting at a terrifyingly high level.

The main difference is that, in this Place, every type of spellcasting represents a form of "blood magic." All spells draw their power from, in part, the life energy of the caster or a (willing or *unwilling*) "donor." Spellcasting as blood magic also means that all unresisted Drain causes Physical rather than Stun damage. Whenever any character casts a spell, wounds spontaneously appear on the caster's body and begin weeping blood. If the caster resists the spell's Drain, these wounds cause no damage, creating a purely "cosmetic" effect that adds to the atmosphere. If the caster fails to completely resist a spell's Drain, the spontaneous wounds cause actual damage. These wounds can be treated normally using first aid or healed with magic. (Of course, casting a healing spell opens up

wounds on the caster ...) Even if a caster successfully resists all Drain, repeated use of magic eventually turns him into a blood-soaked mess. (A secondary consideration is that this physical manifestation of spellcasting immediately tells natives of the Place if a character uses magic. Reactions to this information will vary, as seen in later sections.)

Spellcasters may power their spells using the life energy of a "donor," rather than their own life energy. This appears to be a simple (albeit gruesome) process; as she casts a spell, the caster opens a wound in the donor. The severity of this wound varies according to the power of the spell being cast. The caster must physically inflict the wound on the donor, who must be within arm's reach. For symbolic reasons, most casters who use this method cut the donor with a knife. By using the blood and life force of a donor to power their spells, these casters avoid the more unpleasant consequences of blood magic; they take unresisted Drain as Stun rather than Physical damage, and do not show the usual spontaneous wounds. The donor takes a number of boxes of Physical damage equal to the Force of the spell, and may attempt to reduce this damage by making a Body Test against a target number equal to the Force of the spell. Every 2 successes reduces the damage taken by 1. Whether or not the donor is a volunteer, he or she must be motionless, restrained, or otherwise incapable of resistance.

Actually killing the donor increases the Force of the spell by +3.

Using the life force of a donor to power a spell *appears* to be simple, but is actually a complex procedure requiring the caster to modify the spell in intricate, yet subtle ways. The runners CANNOT learn this procedure. The skills required to power spells through donors and increase a spell's force by killing a donor belong solely to the "villains" in this adventure, and are included only to add an extra touch of horror to the story. None of these techniques will work on any other metaplane or in the "real world."

Something about this metaplane also affects the way conjuring works. When a shaman summons a spirit, he does not necessarily open wounds on his body, but the character takes all Drain as Physical damage, and all Damage levels increase by 1 stage. Modify the Conjuring Drain Table, p. 140, **SRII,** as follows.

Theoretically, this metaplane does not affect a mage's ability to summon elementals. Unfortunately, this theory remains untested, for such summonings require a conjuring library, and such things just don't cross the metaplanar barriers to this Place.

All other magical abilities, including the powers of physical adepts, remain unaffected.

ATTACK FROM ABOVE

After giving the characters some time to come to terms with their environment, have each team member make a

Perception (8) Test. Those who achieve at least 1 success notice something diving toward them out of the overcast sky and have time to react. Those who fail to achieve even a single success are surprised.

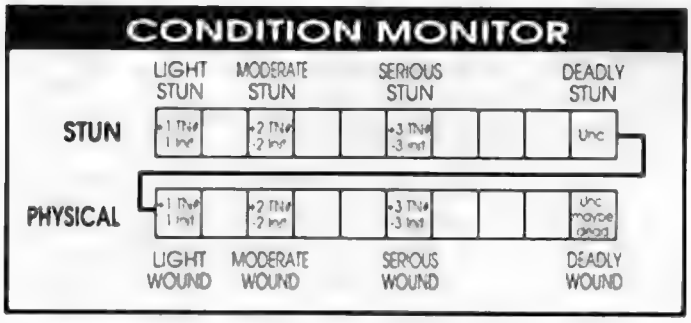
A strange creature plummets out of the sky toward the runners, swooping down on them like some giant hawk. It looks like a black-furred unicorn with huge, black-pinioned wings. Its single horn—as long as a human's forearm, and sharp as a needle—is blood-red. While normal unicorns emanate an aura of peace and tranquillity, this beast radiates an air of sheer, bloody-minded violence.

Flying Unicorn

Known in these parts as an "alacorn" (wing horn), this ferocious carnivore prefers its meat kicking and screaming. Unlike most predators, the alacorn kills for the joy of it as often as for food, and rarely retreats, even from a losing fight.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
7	5 x 5	7	—	3/4	4	(8)	5	8M, +1 Reach

Initiative: 5 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Powers: Venom
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (volcanic rock)



UNEXPECTED AID

The runners should find the fight with the alacorn heavy going without their familiar weapons. Let the runners realize just how deep in the drek they have sunk, then bring in the equalizers: three warriors from the nearby Enclave (see **The Enclave**, p. 34). If it looks like the runners have the fight under control, the newcomers stand at a distance and simply watch. If the three warriors—Maranda (the leader), Tela, and Brannen—decide to help, they stay well out of the fray, pounding arrows into the alacorn whenever they get a safe shot through the melee.

When the alacorn goes down, the warriors cautiously approach the runners, led by Maranda. She reacts suspiciously to any indications that the runners used magic (those weeping wounds give it away)—in her experience, the only people who use magic are enemies of the Enclave. She's developed a sense for the enemy over the years, however, and the runners just don't "fit the profile." She's willing to trust her gut instincts on the issue.

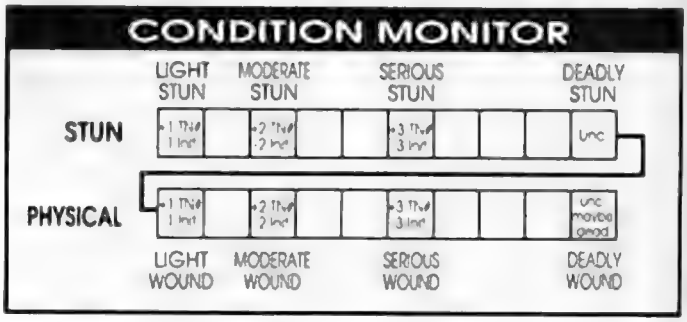
Once she feels mostly confident that the runners are not in service to the enemy, she invites them to the Enclave to meet her leader and her people. She does not provide any specific information, even if questioned, about herself, her people, the land, or their destination. If the runners press the issue, she grudgingly reveals that their destination is a place called the Enclave, and that a man named Leroy leads the community. In response to any other questions, she simply says that Leroy will give them whatever answers he sees fit. After she extends the invitation, Maranda rejoins her companions, and the three of them set out across the wasteland. The runners may decide whether or not to follow. Judging from the angle of the sun, and based on the (unconfirmed) assumption that they're in the northern hemisphere, the runners can conclude the warriors are leading them west.

Maranda

In her early thirties, black-haired Maranda has a marathoner's body, all whipcord muscles and pent-up energy. Her skin is parchment white—her associates share the same complexion—but this paleness is a natural result of environmental conditions, rather than a result of sickness or malnutrition (as denizens of the sprawl might assume). She doesn't say more than she has to, but gives the impression that she hears *everything*. She never looks completely comfortable without her bow in one hand and a sheaf arrow—ready to nock, draw and loose—in the other. Like her two associates, Maranda is a physical adept. (Residents of the Enclave do not consider physical-adept abilities to be "magical" in origin, and so people possessing these abilities earn no taint of the suspicion with which these people view sorcery.)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
5	5	4	2	4	5	6	6	4 (5)	0/2

Initiative: 4 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Physical Adept Abilities: Combat Sense (2), Improved Ability (Projectile Weapons +2), Increased Reaction (+1), Increased Reflexes (+1)
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Etiquette (Enclave) 6, Leadership 2, Projectile Weapons 4 (Bows 6), Stealth 3 (Wilderness 5), Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Bow (STR Min 4, 5M), 12 Arrows, Knife (4L), Leather Clothing (0/2)



Tela and Brannen

Similar in general appearance to their leader and also physical adepts, the sisters Tela and Brannen look about five years younger than Maranda. They lack Maranda's self-confidence, and they *seriously* distrust the strangers. Without permission from Maranda—which she probably won't give—they refuse to speak to the runners.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
5	4	4	1	3	5	6	6	4 (5)	0/2

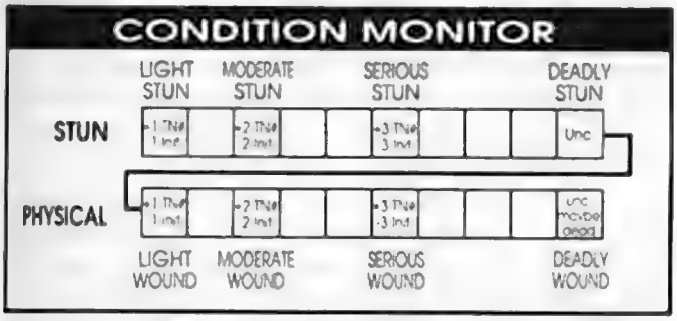
Initiative: 4 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)

Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3

Physical Adept Abilities: Combat Sense (1), Improved Ability (Projectile Weapons +2), Increased Reaction (+1), Increased Reflexes (+1)

Skills: Armed Combat 4, Etiquette (Enclave) 5, Projectile Weapons 3 (Bows 5), Stealth 2 (Wilderness 4), Unarmed Combat 4

Gear: Bow (STR Min. 4, 5M), 12 Arrows, Knife (4L), Leather Clothing (0/2)



DEBUGGING

A suspicious team might decide to probe Maranda's mind magically to take the information they want. The warriors' reaction to whatever magic the runners already used should clue the team into what response to expect, but if they insist on trying it, let them ... and then let them pay for their foolishness. As soon as a mage or shaman starts to cast any spell, superficial wounds open on his flesh, telling Maranda and the other warriors what's happening. In an instant, the three archers snatch up their weapons and do their best to drop the player characters in their tracks. If the runners fail to go down immediately, the warriors make a fighting withdrawal in order to warn the Enclave that enemies lurk in the area.

If the runners decide not to follow Maranda or otherwise alienate her, let them wander around aimlessly in the wasteland for awhile. Just when they think they're never going to find their way out of this dismal situation, let them stumble across the Enclave (see **The Enclave,** p. 34). Of course, without Maranda as escort, they receive a far less friendly welcome. As long as the runners avoid doing anything stupid, like attacking the Enclave's defenders, the team can get back on track when they appear before Leroy.

Go to **The Enclave,** the next section.

THE ENCLAVE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

How much longer can this go on? You've been trekking across this blasted wasteland—scrambling up one knife-edged ridge after another, stumbling down the other side—following the three black-clad women who lead you on at a killing pace for at least three or four hours, you think.

And it *feels* like a week, which would account for the sandpaper rasp of your throat. You've got no supplies—no water, no electrolyte replacement—and your three less-than-friendly tour guides aren't carrying anything to offer you either. Not that they seem to notice any discomfort, of course. No matter how tough the going gets—and it's pretty fragging tough—the three archers don't slacken their pace for a second.

At least you're moving away from the volcanoes and that dark, twisted forest you spotted when you arrived. For some reason, that makes you feel immeasurably better about the whole thing.

You reach the bottom of another narrow ravine, cursing loudly as the loose rocks shift under your boots, threatening to sprain an ankle, and brace yourself to climb up the other side. Your guides are already halfway up (bloody fraggers). Are they never going to stop?

After the team travels for five hours or so, read the following:

You reach the top of *another* brutally steep ridge, and you stop to give your screaming muscles a break. In the far distance—west, you think—you see the silver reflection of light off water. There's a curving shoreline maybe ten klicks away, then the ocean, dotted with islands.

Hey, wait a tick ...

As soon as the runners recover from the shock of realizing they're standing where Seattle should be, read the following:

Your tour guides barely manage to hide their impatience and pity at your apparently irrational claims to recognize this area. As soon as they can get you moving again, they turn hard right and work their way along the top of the ridge. Muscles burning, you follow.

The going seems a little easier now, and after slogging along for a few more minutes, you see what must be the archers' destination. Maybe a klick ahead of you to what you guess is the north, the land flattens out slightly. The ridge you're walking on widens, and joins other broad ridges to create a flat-topped area—almost a mesa—a good 700 meters wide. A rocky knoll rises from the middle of the mesa, and atop that knoll stands something that has to be this "Enclave" Maranda mentioned. For the dozenth time you resent the absence of your binoculars and other vision-enhancement aids as you try to examine the settlement from afar.

The Enclave is nothing special, you can tell that even at this distance. In fact, it reminds you of the artists' impressions of Paleolithic villages you've seen on the Archaeology Channel when the Urban Brawl game's blacked out. There's maybe a dozen buildings—and calling them buildings is being charitable—ranging in size from little bigger than a phone booth to the size of a three-car garage. They all seem to be made of stone, but not the cut-and-dressed type, just various-sized boulders piled up into something that serves as a shelter. The roofs look green and you assume they're covered with whatever passes for turf in this Place, presumably supported by wood beams. A rough wall of stone, a tumble-down affair of piled rocks that you judge to be about three meters high, encloses the entire settlement. Halfway around the circumference of the wall you see a gate made from what looks like heavy, rough-hewn beams of wood. Maranda and the others stride on, their pace increasing now that their destination's in sight.

The archers stop five meters away from the gate and gently lay their bows down at their feet. The movement comes

across as ritualistic, an impression confirmed when Maranda and the others look expectantly at you and the weapons you still cradle in your hands.

Give the runners a moment to decide whether to set their own weapons down or hang on to them, then read the following:

You see movement atop the walls framing the gate. Guards, of course, sheltered behind rough battlements of piled stones. Your skin crawls as you imagine sharp eyes taking a bead on you over the iron sights of crossbows.

But instead of the dull *thwap* of a bolt being fired, you hear a muffled order from above, and the heavy gate swings open. Your guides pick up their weapons. [As you follow suit] They gesture for you to follow them through the gate. You take a deep breath and stride into the heart of the Enclave.

A large man wearing much the same clothes as everyone else waits just inside the gate. He carries a crossbow, cocked and loaded, but not *quite* pointing at anyone.

Maranda crosses to him and speaks quickly in a voice too low for you to overhear. The meaningful glances she keeps shooting at you, however, makes it a no-brainer to guess the topic of conversation. When she stops talking, the man looks you over coolly. "My name is Gareth," he says at last. "Go with Maranda. Leroy will speak with you later." Then he turns and walks away, obviously assuming that his orders will be obeyed without question.

Maranda turns to you. "Come with me," she says flatly. She leads you deeper into the Enclave to one of the smaller buildings. Opening the door, she points inside. "In there," she tells you. "Don't try to leave. Leroy will speak with you." The continuation of the thought—"when he's damn good and ready"—is left unspoken.

HOOKS

Maybe this Place isn't quite as far removed from the "real" one as the runners first thought ... and probably hoped. The realization that the blasted wasteland is actually Seattle after "the Big One" or some other, *more* devastating scourge, should be a real shocker.

Upon first meeting Maranda and friends, the runners might well conclude they're in some kind of replay of *Mad Max*, and that version of the situation will work just fine. When they enter the Enclave, give them the strong impression that this world is even more squalid and depressing than the one in that ancient flat film, and assure them that no Mel Gibson analog will show up to improve the scenery. The runners should definitely sense—eventually, if not at once—that this society is on its way out.

BEHIND THE SCENES

THE OCEAN

When the characters first spot the distant ocean, have all the players make Intelligence (6) Tests for their characters. A single success allows the character to realize why this view looks disturbingly familiar.

Successes	Result
0	The rocks under your feet—they're just rocks, chummer, for all you can tell.
1	The rocks you're examining don't seem to fit into any of the familiar classifications: sedimentary, igneous, metamorphic, and so on. Obviously, some strange ecological processes have been at work around here.
2	You finally make sense of what you're seeing ... and your chest and throat tighten so you can hardly breathe. Some of these rocks ... they're *not real* rocks. They're fine conglomerates mixed with coarse aggregate, with a high metallic content. In other words—*ferroconcrete*. But ferroconcrete exposed to enough energy to change its chemical structure almost beyond recognition.
3 +	But wait, there's more. You can't quite put your finger on it, but something indicates it wasn't radiant heat and radiation that did this to the ferroconcrete. Your first thought was that Seattle got nuked to rubble at some indeterminate time in the past. Yet now, you're not so sure. Something *really* strange has happened here ...

Read the following aloud, addressing it specifically to the players whose characters achieved at least 1 success:

Tox and damnation, *now* you know what's been niggling at the back of your mind for the past few hours. You've *been* here before. Well, not *precisely* here, but ...

That big volcano behind you—that's Mount Rainier. And that one to the north—Mount Baker. And the one on the horizon off to the south—that's got to be Mount St. Helens. To the west, that's Vashon Island, and over there is the peninsula where Bremerton would be in the real world.

And right where you're standing, this would probably be deepest, darkest downtown Auburn.

You're home ... in a manner of speaking.

The runners will almost certainly want to question Maranda about their discovery. The warrior has no interest in discussing these strangers' flights of fancy, but if they insist on asking her about landmarks and other signs of this city they apparently dreamed up, she'll maintain that she has no idea whether there ever was a city on this site. As far as her people's stories go back, the land always was as it is now.

Players into the post-apocalyptic scene may set their characters to examining the area, looking for confirmation that this is actually the Seattle area after some kind of holocaust. The only source of this confirmation is the rocks under their feet. If the runners follow this angle, have the players make Physical Sciences (6) Tests (a concentration in Geology is definitely relevant).

WELCOMING COMMITTEE

Though the runners have to figure it out as they go along, Gareth is Leroy's most trusted lieutenant, and so he is the second most important person in the Enclave. The Enclave doesn't get many visitors, but everyone receives the same greeting: they're sequestered away until Leroy, the leader of the settlement, can speak with them and evaluate their level of threat. Gareth expects to have his orders followed with no back talk. If the runners don't follow Maranda when he tells them to, he simply raises his hand in a silent signal, and eight crossbow-armed guards appear to "escort" the runners to a small storage building (Location 3 on the Enclave map, p. 38).

The team may use the few moments it takes to cross the Enclave to evaluate their new situation.

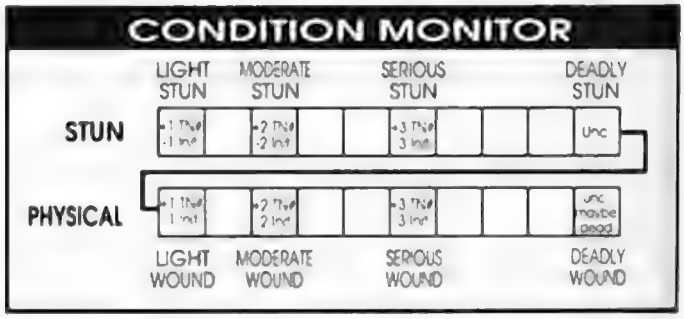
Gareth

In his late thirties, Gareth is a big human, almost two meters tall with shoulders that some trolls might envy. His dark hair and eyes provide a striking contrast to his pale skin. His knuckles and bare forearms are liberally decorated with battle scars. Like Maranda, he's a physical adept.

Gareth truly believes in everything the Enclave stands for, and he is loyal unto death to Leroy personally. He takes his duties—roughly equivalent to security chief—very seriously.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
6	4	6	3	4	6	6	6	4 (6)	0/2

Initiative: 4 (6) + 1D6 (2D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Physical Adept Abilities: Combat Sense (1), Improved Ability (Projectile Weapons +2), Increased Reaction (+2), Increased Reflexes (+1)
Skills: Armed Combat 5, Etiquette (Enclave) 6, Intimidation 2, Leadership 4, Projectile Weapons 5 (Crossbows 7), Stealth 2 (Wilderness 4), Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Medium Crossbow (5M), 12 Bolts, Knife (6L), Leather Clothing (0/2)



THE ENCLAVE

The Enclave offers few amenities. The ground within the enclosing wall consists of the same rocky hardpan the runners struggled over to reach this community, broken here and there by patches of coarse grass. In the center of the enclosed area stands a well, surrounded by a low rock wall. This well offers the only potable water in the entire area.

Physical Structures

As the runners guessed, the building walls consist of carefully piled rock, while the roofs are layers of coarse turf laid over beams of wood. The few windows feature wooden shutters and no glass. Doors are roughly shaped, ill-fitting, and mounted on rusting iron hinges. All in all, the living conditions seem to lean toward the lousy side of primitive.

The runners can smell wood smoke and cooking food and see thin plumes of smoke emerging from rudimentary chimneys atop some of the buildings.

Community Members

As they cross the Enclave, the runners see some of the settlement's residents. A dozen or so guards man positions around the rough battlements of the walls, and another half-dozen or so perform duties within the settlement itself. The runners can also catch sight of maybe two dozen people who apparently make up the regular inhabitants of the Enclave—men and women, with very few children. Everyone stares at the strangers with sullen curiosity tempered with a healthy dose of suspicion, or out-and-out paranoia if any of the runners bear signs that they've been using magic.

In fact, the runners see only a fraction of the Enclave's population; the rest are in the buildings or outside the walls, hunting, foraging, or patrolling the area. The Enclave's total population comprises 36 guards and 120 other inhabitants, plus the "personalities" of this adventure: Gareth, Maranda and her team, Leroy, and his wife Talia.

The entire Enclave subsists on a combination of limited agriculture and hunting-gathering. The settlement cultivates small fields in several of the ravines to the north of the Enclave's mesa (and thus out of sight as the runners approached). Unfortunately, as the runners can learn when they finally meet Leroy and have a chance to get their questions answered, most of the crops the farmers save from the wild beasts that prowl the wilderness come up twisted and mutated, poisonous, or lacking all nutritional value. The farmers themselves need a contingent of guards to do their work to avoid ending up as snacks for various native critters like alacoms.

If the runners spend any time wandering around outside the Enclave, feel free to introduce them to some of these nasties. The beasts that wander this Place possess characteristics similar to "standard" paranormal animals, but always with some kind of dark twist, either to their appearance or their paranatural powers. For example, runners might encounter the local version of the cockatrice, with blood-red feathers, eyes that glow like embers, and the powers of Regeneration and Pestilence in addition to its normal Paralyzing Touch ability. We invite the gamemaster to pull out all the stops, and turn any critters the team meets into rabid nightmares.

Even though no one can summon the courage to admit it openly, the Enclave is dying. The most obvious clue is that people are dying faster than healthy children are being born. Those who recognize this ugly truth have begun to despair, and the feeling is starting to spread through the settlement.

Guards

Made up of an equal proportion of men and women, the Enclave's guards have never known anything but this life of hardship. All these humans have hair and eyes in the normal gamut of shades, but their pale complexions make them look half-dead. All wear "standard-issue" leather clothing and carry knives on their belts. Those on wall duty also carry crossbows or longbows. Those carrying out other errands typically carry swords or clubs. Observant characters may notice a number of nasty-looking pole arms leaning against the walls, strategically placed to help repel a major assault. (If the runners decide to start trouble, treat as many as one in three of the mundane guards as physical adepts of the same level as Tela and Brannen.) Additional condition monitors appear in the back of this book.

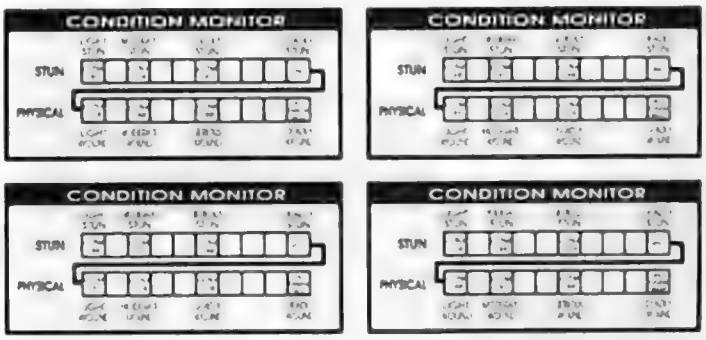
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	4	4	1	3	5	6	3	0/2

Initiative: 3 + 1D6

Threat/Professional Ratings: 2/3

Skills: Armed Combat 4, Etiquette (Enclave) 4, Projectile Weapons 3 (Bows or Crossbows 5), Stealth 2 (Wilderness 4), Unarmed Combat 4

Gear: Bow (STR Min. 4, 5M) or Medium Crossbow (5M), 12 Arrows or Bolts; **or** Sword (6M) **or** Club (5M Stun); Knife (4L), Leather Clothing (0/2)



Enclave Inhabitants

Never trained to thrive under harsh treatment as were the guards, their lives weigh heavy on these humans, who range in age from young children to adults in their mid-40s. (Apparently, no one grows older than about 45. ...) A wide range of hair and eye colors offset their uniformly pale complexions. On a Perception (4) Test, the runners will notice that *everyone*—even the children—carries a knife on his or her belt. If needed, use the condition monitors provided at the back of the book.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	3	4*	1	3	5	6	3	0/2

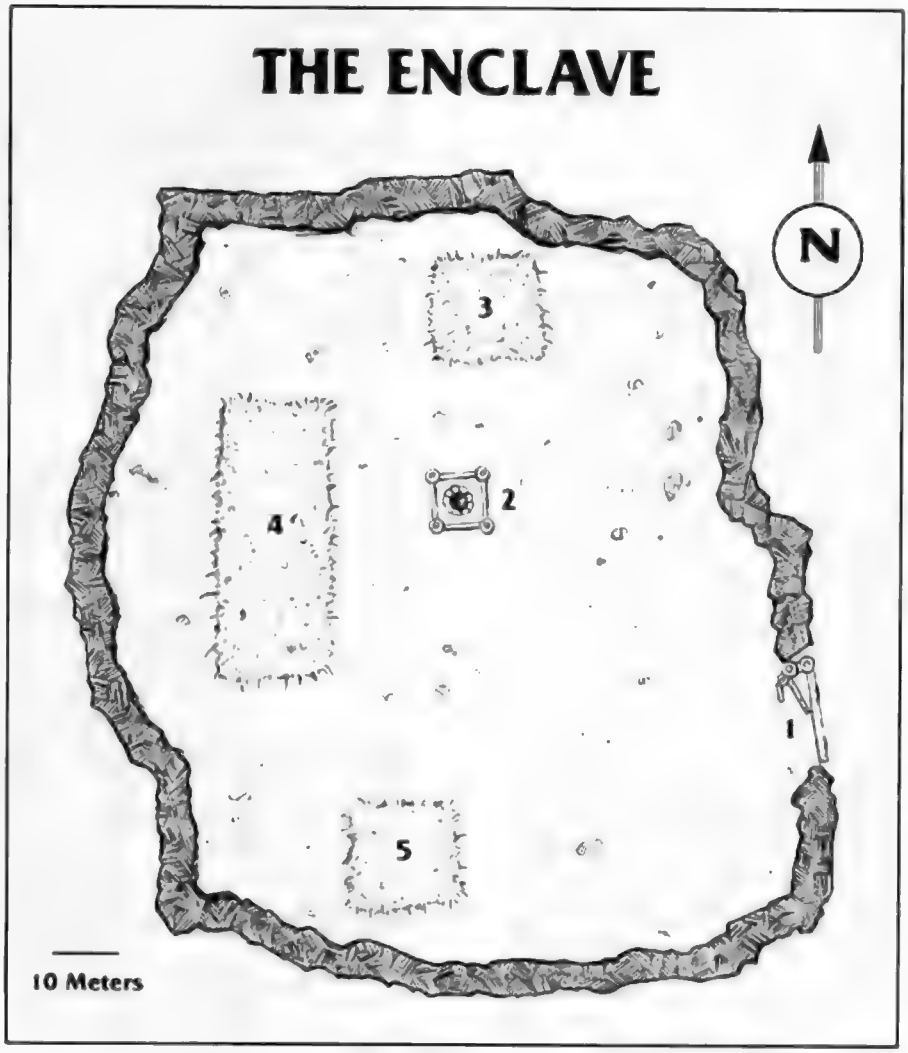
Initiative: 3 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/3
Skills: Armed Combat 3, Etiquette (Enclave) 5, Projectile Weapons 2, Stealth 2, Unarmed Combat 2
Gear: Knife (4L), Leather Clothing (0/2)

*Decrease STR and the Damage Code for the knife as appropriate for children.

ENCLAVE MAP KEY

Gate (1)

The heavy wooden gate has a Barrier Rating of 13, and it requires a total Strength of 12 to swing the gate open. The gate is large enough that four people can combine their efforts to open or close it. When the guards shut the gate, they secure it with a heavy bar that requires a total Strength of 8 to lift.



Well (2)

The well shaft measures two meters in diameter. The surface of the clear, pure, cold water lies two meters below ground level; the water itself is ten meters deep. Six buckets with ropes attached rest on the rough balustrade.

Storage Building (3)

Maranda takes the runners to this storage building and tells them to wait until Leroy has time to speak to them. The shed is dark, dank, and smells unpleasant. For a complete description of this building, see **Tell It to Them Straight** in **Leroy**, p. 39.

Long House (4)

The largest and most important building in the Enclave, the "long house" serves as Leroy's home and the settlement's equivalent of a city hall. The Enclave always stations two guards, armed with swords and pole arms, outside the main door.

Smithy (5)

The forge fire burns constantly so that at least two Enclave inhabitants can continually work at forging swords and other needed implements.

DEBUGGING

The runners can easily get sidetracked if they provoke a fight with the gate guards. If they act so foolishly, let them suffer the consequences. The six gate guards carry medium crossbows (5M damage), and they know how to use them. To add to the runners' woes in this situation, the team is standing unprotected in the open, while the guards receive partial cover when they're firing (+4 to the runners' target numbers). While reloading their crossbows, the guards crouch behind the rough rock battlements, which have a Barrier Rating of 8. The sounds of battle immediately attract more Enclave guards and "regular" inhabitants who arm themselves with whatever weapons they have at hand. Maranda and friends also figure into this equation; all in all, the runners would be *much* better off minding their manners.

They may run into the same problems if they decide to refuse Gareth's orders. Adjust the locals' reactions based on how in-your-face the runners act. The people of the Enclave don't trust anyone they don't know, particularly people who use magic, and it won't take much to persuade them that the runners are better off dead. Feel free to drop some not-so-subtle hints to this effect. If the runners refuse to wait in the storage building but also manage to avoid goading Maranda and the others into violence, Gareth eventually relents, allowing the runners to stay in the compound guarded by Maranda and her team, plus another eight well-armed guards, while he informs Leroy of their presence.

If everything occurs as suggested here, go to **Leroy**, page 39. If the runners avoid waiting in the storage building, go to **Leroy** and begin where the two parties meet.

LEROY

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Adjust the following description to reflect the events of *The Enclave*.

You enter the building and the door closes behind you.

It's dark in here. The only light is what can leak in around the mismatched edges of the door and through chinks between the rocks of the walls. The low ceiling forces the taller members of your team to hunch over, almost crouch, to avoid smacking their heads. The predominant smell in the air is blood, mixed with other earthy odors. Half a dozen gutted and skinned carcasses hang from the beams overhead. A nasty suspicion leads you to examine them a little closer, and you're relieved to find four legs on each carcass—some local equivalent of boars, you'd guess. Stacked against the walls are wicker baskets containing some kind of unidentifiable grain—coarse, gritty stuff reminiscent of gravel—something you take to be a potato-analog, and a bitter-smelling vegetable that looks like a gray-skinned tomato. If this is what the people of the Enclave eat, it's no wonder they look depressed.

Give the runners a few minutes to discuss their situation and consider their options, then read the following:

Suddenly, the door swings open. After the relative darkness of the storeroom, even the muted illumination outside makes your eyes water, and you long for your missing flare compensation. Through your tears, you can see at least a dozen people gathered outside. And every one is clad all in black and armed with assorted weapons—all low-tech, but quite capable of tearing through the thin leather you wear.

"Come out." You recognize the voice and the flat delivery as that of Gareth. Cautiously, you obey.

A semicircle of armed guards covers every angle of the building's doorway—eight plus Maranda and her team. They're all poised for action, bows and crossbows ready to come to bear in an instant. Just beyond the cordon of guards you see another knot of figures: Gareth, flanked by four guards carrying pole arms, plus someone you've never met but who looks startlingly familiar.

Harlequin? No ... not quite. The similarity is striking—the same hair, the same chiseled features, the same piercing eyes. But this man is unmistakably human. He's wearing a leather jumpsuit and a cloak of black fabric that billows around his shoulders. This must be Leroy.

"Come out," Gareth repeats, "and set your weapons on the ground. *All* of them."

As soon as the runners (quite sensibly) relinquish their weapons, read the following:

"My name is Leroy," says the man who resembles Harlequin. Though he wears a stern expression, his voice sounds curious rather than threatening. "Who are you people, and what is your business here?"

HOOKS

This scene will answer some of the runners' questions, and no doubt pose more. The amount of information they receive will depend entirely on how they behave toward Leroy.

The emphasis placed on Leroy by everyone else in the Enclave should tell the runners that the leader represents the key figure in this mystery play. Without his cooperation, they'll never learn what they need to know, never retrieve whatever item they were sent here to find ... and perhaps fail to return home in one piece. Ideally, they should feel overwhelmed, out of their element, and out of their depth.

BEHIND THE SCENES

When she shuts the runners into the storage building, Maranda leaves Tela and Brannen and three other armed guards outside to make sure they don't go anywhere.

Leroy arrives after a suitable interval, accompanied by more than a dozen guards and followers (see p. 43 in **Debugging** for more about Leroy). When Gareth orders the runners to lay down their weapons, they have a choice. If they hesitate or refuse, the guards train their bows on the runners' hearts, but don't fire unless the characters do something really stupid. The overall tone of the subsequent conversation with Leroy will be much colder, of course, but the conversation still takes place. If the runners willingly give up their visible weapons, the guards assume the equivalent of "parade rest," watching but not overtly threatening the team.

As his tone of voice suggests, Leroy feels more curious about the strangers than threatened by them, which is the exact opposite of Gareth's feelings. As long as the runners remain at least marginally polite and do not make any verbal or physical threats, Leroy dismisses all but four of his personal "honor guards" (plus Gareth and Maranda) and talks openly with the runners. He answers any questions the runners ask, but if they ask anything that could be interpreted as intelligence-gathering efforts by an enemy, then Gareth's face clouds up, and Leroy refuses to answer and immediately becomes more suspicious of the team and their motives. If the gamemaster considers the runners to have made a sufficiently favorable impression, Leroy invites them to join him in the long house, much to Gareth's outrage.

If Leroy invites the runners to the long house for their discussion, the team meets his wife, Talia. She'll do what she can to make the runners feel at home, but does not contribute much to the discussion unless the team actively draws her in. (See below for her description and stats.)

Leroy willingly answers personal questions about himself (see **Leroy** in **Debugging**, p. 43). On a successful Psychology (5) Test, the runners realize that Leroy is actually rather glad to discuss his crisis of faith with someone who might understand and conceivably show him a way out.

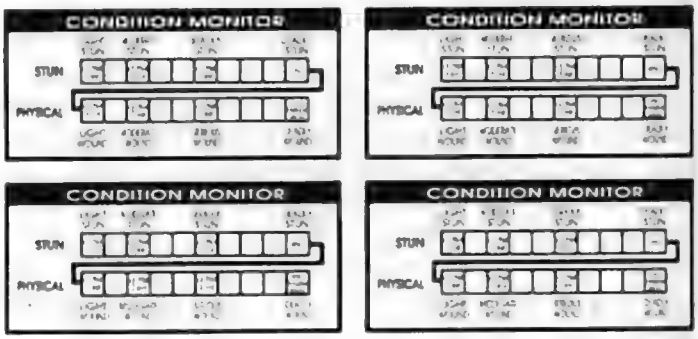
No matter how much he may come to trust the runners, Leroy never dismisses his personal "honor guard" in their presence. Depending on how thoroughly the team allays his fears, he may dismiss Gareth (provoking a look of absolute outrage from his lieutenant, but no argument). Encourage the players to earn Leroy's trust through mundane means. If necessary, remind them that casting spells opens small wounds on the caster's body; everyone in the Enclave understands the meaning of these wounds, and predictably assumes that the strangers are trying to influence Leroy with their "dark powers." They react violently, and *now*. Using magic to make Leroy trust them *isn't* a tactically sound decision.

Leroy's Honor Guard (4)

These two men and two women represent "the few, the proud" within the Enclave, and will use their physical adept powers to protect Leroy to their dying breath.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
6	6	5	2	3	5	6	6	4 (5)	0/2

Initiative: 4 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/4
Physical Adept Abilities: Combat Sense (2), Improved Ability (Armed Combat +2), Increased Reaction (+1), Increased Reflexes (+1)
Skills: Armed Combat 6 (Pole Arms 8), Etiquette (Enclave) 4, Projectile Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Knife (4L), Leather Clothing (0/2), Pole Arm (5S), Sword (7M)



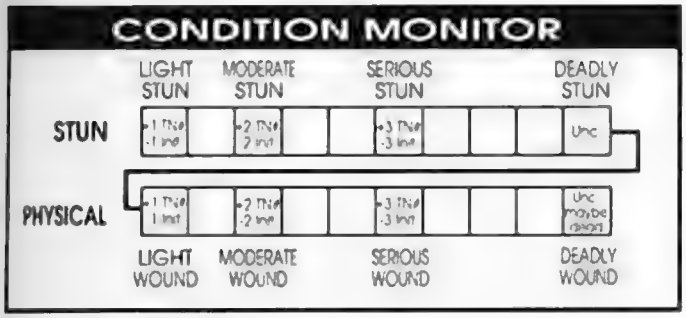
Talia

Tall and very beautiful despite being rail-thin, Talia is in her late 20s. She wears her ebony hair long and straight, and her eyes are brilliant green. She speaks rarely, but always to the point. She seems wrapped in an air of ineffable sadness, as though she looks into a dark and bitter future.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	5	3	5	5	6	6	5	0/2

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/3

Skills: Armed Combat 3, Etiquette (Enclave) 6, Leadership 2, Psychology 4, Stealth 5 (Urban 7)
Gear: Knife (3L), Leather Clothing (0/2)



THE STORY SO FAR

The Enclave is older than any of its current inhabitants. Their folk tales tell of still earlier days, of a time when their ancestors roamed this area as nomadic hunters. As recently as five generations ago, their people would only occasionally stay in one place long enough to establish small agricultural preserves. The wild creatures that also roamed the wasteland made life difficult, but many pure streams ran down the ravines from the distant mountains to water the reasonably fertile earth.

Perhaps 60 or 70 years ago, things began to change. The streams began to dry up or became poisoned. The soil also changed; many crops withered and died entirely, and those plants that did survive grew twisted and stunted.

Attacks by ferocious animals began to increase. Where once the nomadic hunters fought off an alacorn assault once every few weeks, now the flying predators attacked almost daily. Horrific creatures they'd never seen before—far more deadly than alacorns—began emerging from the mountain slopes. The nomads bowed to necessity and built the walled Enclave over the only pure spring still flowing.

As the Enclave inhabitants retreated from the horrors of the land, they learned of another settlement of people also forced to withdraw, somewhere up in the foothills of the volcano equivalent to Mount Baker. This settlement was ruled by a mysterious leader who called himself "Oscuro"—no one within the Enclave knew whether the name was a title or a personal name. Leroy now believes that "Oscuro" is actually a title, as someone using that name still rules the other settlement.

Oscuro

For several years, the other settlement remained as much of a mystery as its leader. The Enclave repeatedly sent representatives to meet with this other group, find out more about it, and propose cooperation. None of these representatives ever met Oscuro himself. The difficult overland journey killed many of the Enclave's representatives; they often fell to accidents or hostile creatures. Those who managed to reach Oscuro's settlement and survive the return journey reported that they spoke only with the lowest-level members of Oscuro's government. These functionaries agreed in principle with the Enclave's suggestions of cooperation, but nothing ever came of these discussions. Oscuro promised—also through intermediaries—that he'd send a delegation to the Enclave, but that also never happened.

Though the representatives never met Oscuro and never were allowed opportunity to explore his mountain settlement, the Enclave eventually pieced together a reasonably accurate picture of Oscuro's society.

It was grim: Oscuro's society offered a dark, perverted reflection of life in the Enclave. Though physically hard—nobody in the Enclave ever had quite enough to eat, and the local animals presented a constant danger—the inhabitants of the Enclave knew no spiritual or social constraints. Each person made his own decisions, felt free to gather and speak openly (even against the minimal existing government), and had a say—if he cared to exercise it—in the settlement's policies. The Enclave's government consisted of a single leader chosen by consensus who held "power" only so long as the rest of the community continued listening to his opinions and advice. Leroy is the Enclave's current leader.

The Collective

By contrast, the inhabitants of Oscuro's settlement seemed better off, at least physically. Their limited attempts at agriculture seemed more successful than the Enclave's, and the mountain settlement's hunting parties almost always returned with prey. The mountain settlement's sole physical problem lay in its lack of pure drinking water. Oscuro's people had to set up elaborate means of filtering and purifying water drawn from nearby springs, and the community seemed certain to eventually exceed the capacity of those purification methods.

From a social and spiritual perspective, however, life seemed worse in Oscuro's camp. The entire society functioned as a survival machine, and every man, woman, and child served only as a cog in that machine. Individuals were forced to subordinate their hopes, dreams, and aspirations to the survival of "the Collective" (Leroy's name for Oscuro's society). Oscuro's society stifled individual freedom, creativity, and the human spirit in general, and Oscuro himself ruled as an absolute dictator through fear and force. From Leroy's description, the runners might suspect that the Collective borrowed a form of government apparently invalidated during the upheavals of the 1990s, but it's actually based largely on the model of the megacorporation.

The Collective's population has grown steadily over the past five decades. Until recently, Oscuro made no effort to conceal the fact of his repressive rule, or that he and his lieutenants use blood magic to aid the Collective and to keep the "citizenry" in line. He and those he trusts also use some forms of primitive cyberware. The Enclave, in contrast, rejected the use of magic and cybertech from its founding, and considers both "technologies" tainted and evil.

Nearly 30 years ago, the leader of the Enclave realized the true extent of Oscuro's dark, soul-destroying society and stopped sending delegations, basically cutting off all communication with the Collective.

Overtures

In the five years or so since the people of the Enclave chose Leroy as their leader, Oscuro has begun making over-

tures toward the Enclave. Oscuro's representatives suggest that the two societies merge into one settlement and therefore increase everyone's chances for surviving the harsh environment. The Collective's delegations always point out the difficulties of life in the Enclave (showing more specific knowledge about those hardships than Leroy considers strictly innocent) and then extol the physically easier conditions within the Collective: more food, better shelter, improved standard of living, lower infant mortality, better "health care."

And some of the Enclave's people listen. When the delegates arrive, they always ask to speak directly to the people of the village, and Leroy always gives them permission to do so. While Gareth consistently counsels against this, Leroy refuses to censor what his people hear. The representatives' claims of better living conditions strike a chord with many within the Enclave, particularly those who've lost children to malnutrition.

Personally, Leroy dismisses these descriptions of "the good life" in the Collective because he knows that Oscuro's people pay a large spiritual price for their physical survival, and he feels no desire to pay that price himself. He assumes that Oscuro's efforts to re-establish contact after so many years means that the Collective finally outgrew its potable water supply and needs the Enclave's well.

However, Leroy must temper his dislike of the Collective and face a bitter realization: the Enclave is dying. Leroy knows that keeping the Enclave isolated means eventual death, and while he, Gareth, and many others prefer to die free rather than trade their liberty for continued survival, Leroy cannot make that decision for others.

Each time a delegation arrives from the Collective, a handful of Leroy's people follow the representatives into the foothills. This slow defection only speeds the Enclave's downfall, but Leroy will not forbid his people to leave. While Oscuro obviously wants the Enclave's water supply, not more mouths to feed, the Collective claims to welcome any who decide to join its ranks.

In the last few months, the Enclave's condition has deteriorated dramatically. Its farmers often find their crops destroyed overnight. Hunting parties vanish without a trace. Every depredation could be reasonably attributed to wild animals, but Leroy feels certain that Oscuro is directing these events to put more pressure on the Enclave.

Involving the Runners

The Story So Far describes the events that took place before the team's arrival. After hearing this story, the runners might offer to help Leroy in some way, perhaps by guarding the fields or undertaking a search-and-destroy mission to catch the party responsible for destroying the crops. While Gareth doesn't trust the runners as far as he can throw them, Leroy gladly accepts their help. Whatever the runners decide to do, make sure they return to the Enclave in time to meet Oscuro's next delegation (see **The Delegation,** p. 44).

LONG HOUSE MAP KEY

Leroy's Quarters (1)

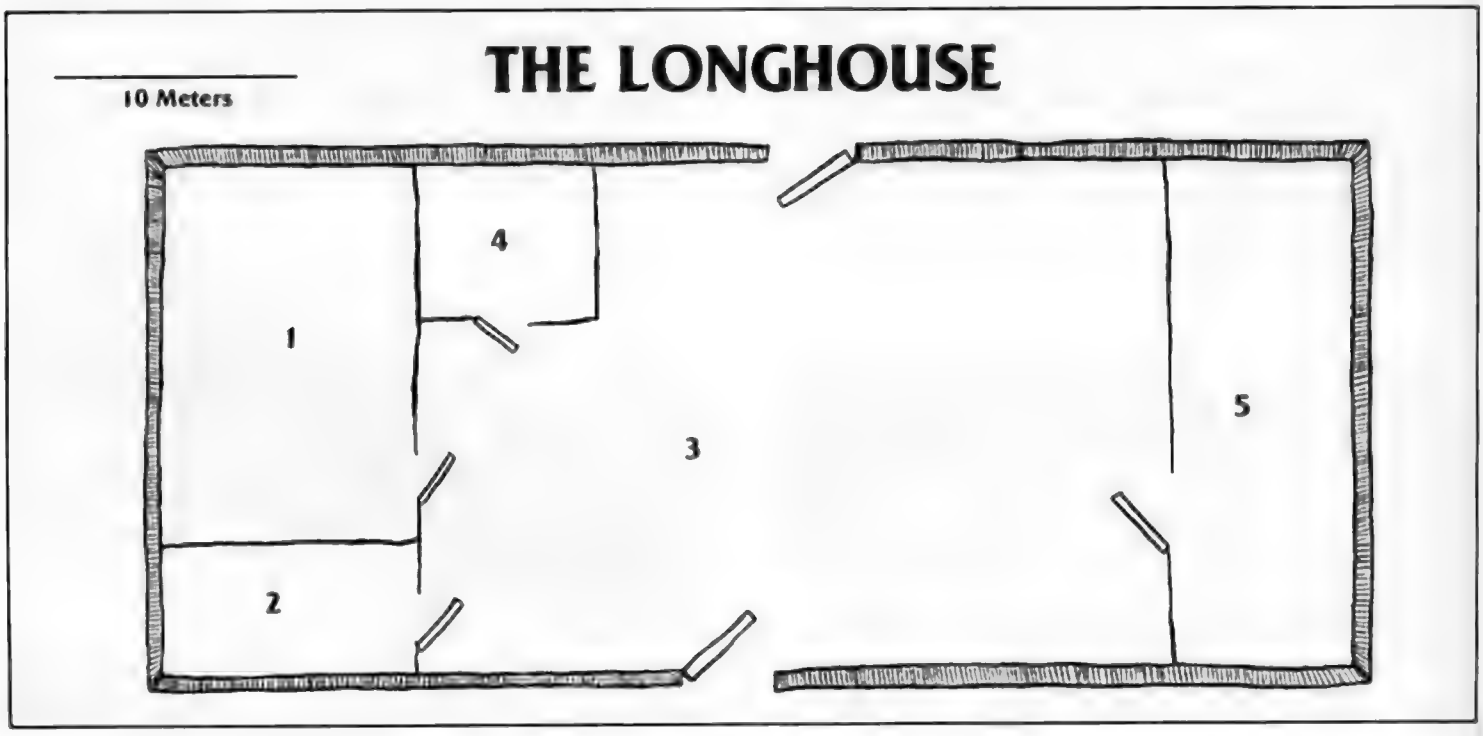
Luxurious by Enclave standards, the runners consider Leroy's quarters one (small) step up from sordid.

Armory (2)

The armory provides safe storage for spare weapons. If Leroy accepts the runners' offer of help, he sends them here to kit themselves out with weapons. As before, the gamemaster decides what weapons to make available in this Place.

Meeting Hall (3)

The meeting hall serves as the heart of the long house. Leroy holds all official meetings in this large, open area lit by smoking oil lamps.



Gareth's Quarters (4)

Leroy's first lieutenant occupies these Spartan quarters. Gareth insisted that he sleep close to Leroy in order to protect him.

Guards' Quarters (5)

Eight of Leroy's personal guards live here.

DEBUGGING

Because of their nature and their mission, the runners may refuse to stay put like good little puppets and decide to scope out the Enclave on their own. If spotted, they receive the treatment described in **Debugging,** p. 38 in **The Enclave,** but more so; after all, the strangers already proved they're incapable of taking orders. The runners' most likely move is to send one or more of their number to investigate astrally. If so, let the astral scout(s) spot Leroy with his sidemen on his way to speak with the team. If necessary, hint that it might not be politic (considering the local distrust of magic) if some of the runners aren't "at home" when the boss-man arrives.

If the runners go out of their way to alienate Leroy and Gareth, Leroy orders his guards to boot the team out of the Enclave. If the gamemaster decides to give the team a chance to get back on track, they could "accidentally" encounter Oscuro's minions taking Talia to the Collective (see **The Price of Peace,** p. 47). If they succeed in rescuing the "damsel in distress," Oscuro responds by mobilizing his forces and marching on the Enclave. Go to **Leroy's Last Stand,** p. 50.

If things progress as outlined in this section, go to **The Delegation,** p. 44.

LEROY

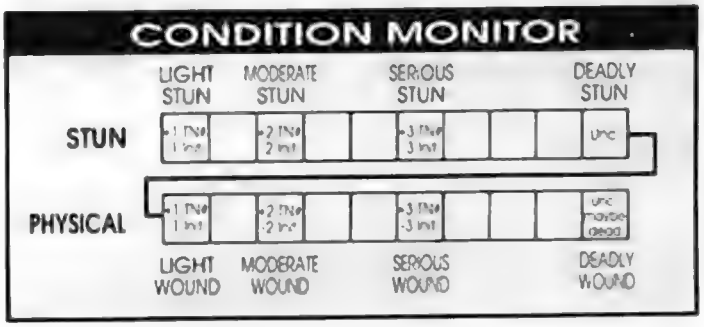
Born 28 years ago to parents long since dead, Leroy knows only life in the Enclave. (Predictably, he knows nothing about such nonsense as "metaplanes" or "netherworlds." *This* is the real world, end of discussion. He knows nothing about anyone named Harlequin, and fails to grasp the concept that he serves as a manifestation or avatar.)

In another world, Leroy might have been a poet or philosopher. In this world, circumstances conspired to force him into the role of leader of the Enclave. He had no ambition to gain this position and would gladly step down if there was someone to replace him. For reasons he's never understood, most of the Enclave's inhabitants seem completely convinced that Leroy is the best person for the job and that nobody could handle the responsibilities nearly as well. He has groomed others to take over as leader, but each time the Enclave's circumstances took a downturn, the community, including his chosen replacement, turned to Leroy for guidance. They continue to believe in him because he seems infallible, but Leroy feels an increasing pressure to perform that threatens to overwhelm him. He knows that the people trust him to keep them alive, and the first time he makes a major error, his already shaky self-esteem will collapse. When this happens, he'll almost certainly abdicate his role as leader, unwilling to allow his people to continue to trust their lives to someone unworthy of that trust. And because no one stands ready to take his place when he steps aside, the Enclave will have no guidance and begin to collapse as a society.

If it's pointed out, Leroy finds bitter amusement in the etymology of his name: a corruption of *le Roi*, "the king." He finds bitter amusement in many things these days.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
5	6	5 (6)	5	5	6	6	6	5 (6)	0/2

Initiative: 5 (6) + 1D6 (2D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Physical Adept Abilities: Improved Ability (Armed Combat +6), Improved Physical Attributes (Strength +1, Reaction +1), Increased Reflexes (+1)
Skills: Armed Combat 6 (12), Etiquette (Enclave) 6, Leadership 5, Projectile Weapons 3, Psychology 2, Unarmed Combat 6
Gear: Knife (6L), Leather Clothing (0/2), Sword [8M, Weapon Focus (3)]



THE DELEGATION

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Your hosts suddenly launch into a flurry of activity, apparently caused by something happening outside the walls of the Enclave. Your curiosity piqued, you drift toward the gate.

The heavy doors stand open, flanked by armed guards. You see Leroy, Gareth, and Talia striding over to take up positions just inside the gates. A welcoming party of some kind, you decide.

Now you see who they're welcoming. Five trolls, the first metahumans you've seen here, dressed in fancy tunics and doublets and looking like refugees from a Renaissance fair. Under other circumstances, they'd look ludicrous. Contrasted with the rough leather garb of the Enclave people, however, their clothes make them look affluent, well-fed, and healthy. At a guess, you'd say they hail from the Collective.

Leroy steps forward and shakes hands with the largest of the trolls, obviously the leader of the delegation. (Hey, that troll has cybereyes! Even if they are big, clunky things.)

Leroy points toward the long house and leads the visitors into the building. Four of Leroy's bodyguards station themselves outside the door to guarantee privacy for the conference.

Unless the runners interfere, the meeting lasts an hour or so. At the end of that time, read the following:

The door of the long house bursts open and the trolls stride out, barely restrained violence showing in every movement and expression. Obviously, negotiations didn't go well. Leroy and Gareth follow them out, and they look just as unhappy. Leroy's bodyguards shift alertly, gripping their weapons in response to the violence they feel in the air.

But nothing happens. Oscuro's delegates stalk angrily to the gate and out of the Enclave without bothering to say good-by. The gates slam shut behind them, and Leroy and Gareth vanish back into the long house.

Sometime later, read the following:

You remember noticing that Tela and Brannen seemed particularly interested in the Collective's delegation. You decide to try and get the pair to answer some of your multitude of questions.

But when you look, the two warriors are nowhere to be found. No one you talk to has seen them in hours.

HOOKS

Initially, the runners should sense that major, far-reaching events are afoot, and they're watching the conclusion of a political gavotte that the two communities have been dancing for years. Though they can alter the details, they lack the influence to change the broad sweep of events.

Later, the runners clearly see that the issue has reached a flash point and that the relationship between the Enclave and the Collective has degenerated to violence. The runners choose their level of involvement, but they should understand that if events continue on their present course, things will turn out badly for the Enclave.

BEHIND THE SCENES

DEALING WITH THE DELEGATION

As the players should guess, this delegation brings the latest overtures from Oscuro and the Collective. Leroy and Gareth obviously choose to discuss these important matters privately with the troll emissaries.

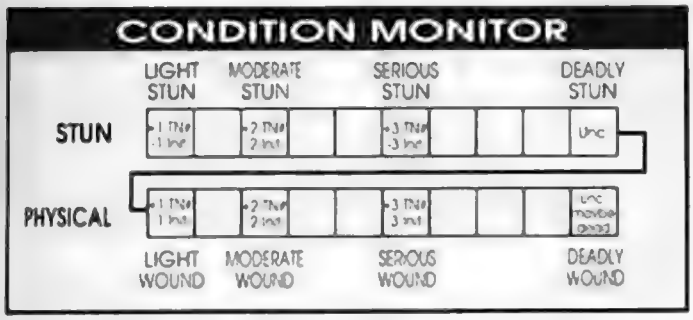
On a successful Perception (6) Test, the runners notice that the trolls are wearing some kind of armor under their clothes. If they look around the Enclave while the delegation walks to the long house, they notice Tela and Brannen watching the trolls from a distance. On a successful Psychology (8) Test, the runners notice that the sisters' body language and expressions seem wistful.

Delegation Leader

A hermetic mage, the delegation leader serves as one of Oscuro's minor lieutenants and is completely loyal to his master. His current mission is to increase the pressure on Leroy to join forces with the Collective, and so he cops a combative attitude from the start. He wears the equivalent of a vest with plates (4/3) under his clothes. If he casts spells, he uses his knife to draw his own blood to power his magic, taking any unresisted Drain as Physical damage. If the runners witness this, they'll gain a better understanding of how magic works here.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
11 (12)	4	10	2	4	4	5.8	5	4	4/3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/4
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Conjuring 2, Etiquette (Enclave) 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Magic Theory 3, Projectile Weapons 4, Sorcery 5, Unarmed Combat 3
Spells: Chaotic World 3, Ignite 4
Cyberware: Cybereyes
Gear: Light Crossbow (5L), 12 Bolts, Sword (8M), Vest with Plates (4/3)
Notes: +1 Reach for armed/unarmed combat, Dermal Armor (1)



Delegates (4)

These guys fall firmly into the goon category and have only one responsibility: keeping their leader alive in a scrap.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
11 (12)	4	10	1	2	3	6	3	4/3

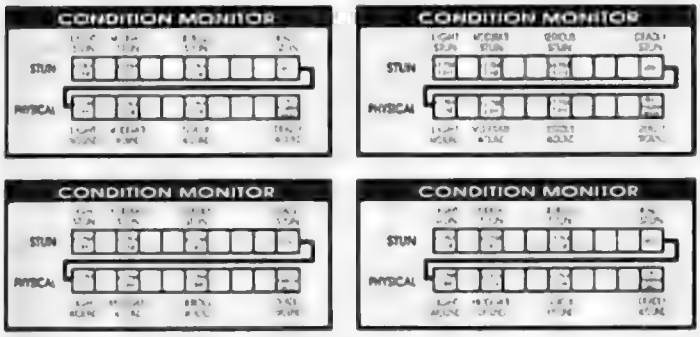
Initiative: 3 + 1D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 3/4

Skills: Armed Combat 4, Etiquette (Enclave) 1, Intimidation 1, Projectile Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Gear: Light Crossbow (5L), 12 Bolts, Sword (8M), Vest with Plates (4/3)

Notes: +1 Reach for armed/unarmed combat, Dermal Armor (1)



Negotiations

Unless the runners interrupt the proceedings, negotiations last for about an hour before breaking down into mutual recriminations and insults. Gareth and Leroy both recognize that the trolls arrived with no real intention of reaching an agreement; in fact, their main goal was to cause a "diplomatic incident." If the runners ask about the purpose of the visit, Leroy admits the Collective's aims quite openly. Gareth, naturally, refuses to discuss the matter with the runners. Leroy and Gareth fear that the Enclave now stands one step closer to unmitigated war with the Collective.

TELA AND BRANNEN

As the runners might guess, Tela and Brannen finally decided to throw in their lot with Oscuro. As soon as the delegation left the Enclave, they sneaked away and followed the trolls back to the Collective. If the players don't discover this for themselves, find some subtle way to let them know that Tela and Brannen went "over the wall."

RANGE WAR

The Collective now escalates its campaign of violence against the Enclave. Acting openly for the first time, Collective assault teams begin raiding the Enclave's fields—burning the crops, salting the fields—and killing everyone they catch. Other teams lie in wait for Enclave hunting parties. Though the Collective has yet to mount an assault on the Enclave itself, most people believe it's only a matter of time. Though Gareth and some others urge Leroy to mount reciprocal assaults against the Collective, Leroy knows that the Enclave lacks the resources for that kind of operation. Further, assigning soldiers to assault groups would mean less protection for those members who remained in the Enclave.

The runners may involve themselves in the violence in any way they see fit, perhaps guarding the Enclave's fields or the hunting parties. Or they might choose more direct action, like ambushing Collective assault teams.

They might even propose making a direct assault against the Collective, but for once, Leroy and Gareth agree and forbid them to try. Leroy forbids any Enclave personnel to accompany the runners on such a wild-goose chase, and an assault without support troops would be a messy form of suicide. Leroy still clings to the hope that Oscuro will reopen negotiations and allow him to solve their differences through diplomacy.

This state of affairs lasts for three or four days (unless the runners do something to speed up the timetable). During this period, the Enclave loses a dozen people and an equal number suffer wounds from the Collective's attacks.

The Collective's Forces

The make-up of any Collective assault team depends on its mission and on the expected level of resistance. For example, if the Collective initially sends six-person assault teams against the farmers, and the runners begin defending the fields or Leroy assigns guards to the people working the fields, future assaults might involve twelve-person teams.

Collective Soldiers (6+)

Though well-armed, reasonably skilled, and single-minded in their devotion to their cause, these soldiers will not throw their lives away needlessly—but seem quite willing to die if that's what the mission requires. Their apparent soullessness makes them particularly frightening opponents. They refuse to be taken prisoner.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
5	5	5	1	2	6	Varies	3	0/2

Initiative: 3 + 1D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 2/4

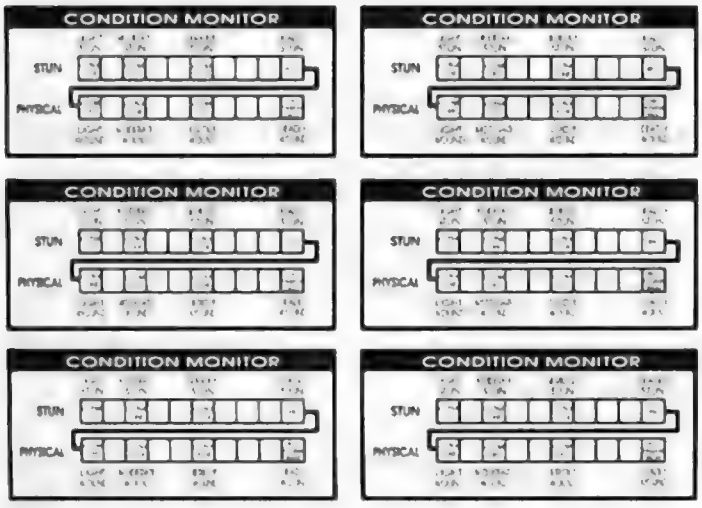
Skills: Armed Combat 5, Projectile Weapons 5, Stealth 3 (Wilderness 5), Unarmed Combat 4

Cyberware: Many carry cyberware similar to that of the delegation, at the gamemaster's discretion.

Gear: Bow (STR Min. 4, 5M), 12 Arrows; **or** Sword (7M); Knife (5L), Leather Clothing (0/2)

DEBUGGING

If the runners find a way to start trouble in this encounter, Leroy and Gareth try to break it up before anyone gets killed



by incapacitating the runners (preferably without hurting them) and sending Oscuro's delegates on their way. (Even in this Place, it's bad form to allow anything to happen to diplomats.) If the runners geek the delegates, the story continues unaffected—Oscuro simply uses the death of his emissaries as the excuse he needs to escalate the tension between the Collective and the Enclave.

Despite Leroy's orders to the contrary, the runners might decide to take the fight to Oscuro. They find it relatively easy to sneak out of the Enclave, but don't know how to find the Collective. If they plan to wait for a Collective strike team and follow it home, the first team they find is the one taking Talia to Oscuro (see **The Price of Peace**, p. 47). This gives the runners the opportunity to rescue the "damsel in distress."

THE PRICE OF PEACE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

After a few days highlighted by repeated raids by the Collective, read the following:

Morale here in the Enclave was pretty low at the best of times. Now, after a few days of this will-sapping guerrilla warfare, you can't imagine how it could get any lower. Something has to change, and soon, or the Enclave is doomed.

You're eating a late midday meal—a bowl of gruel colored with one of the last pseudo-tomatoes in stock—when you hear a commotion from the direction of the gate. You almost hope that the Collective finally decided to make a direct attack. You hurry to the wall and climb to the battlements.

The Collective force approaching is not an attacking army, only two dozen people led by a single individual carrying a white flag on a short staff. You refuse to believe that this is a flag of parlay. The approaching force stops half a dozen yards short of the gate.

Suddenly, Leroy stands beside you on the battlements, scrutinizing the Collective force. "What do you want?" he calls out after a moment.

A large human, dressed even more extravagantly than the troll delegates, steps forward. As the rest of the force subtly shifts around him, you realize that the other 23 people came along solely to escort and guard this huge man. He strides closer to the gate, then stops, fists on hips, and looks up at you. "I seek the one called Leroy," he says in a voice like rocks rattling around in a helmet.

From the corner of your eye, you see Talia move nearer to her husband, as though seeking the reassurance of physical contact.

"I am Leroy."

The big man's face twists into an expression that you mentally tag as a nightmare smile. More like an expression of unholy glee—the kind of expression you'd expect from an arsonist watching the brushfire he set engulf a day-care center. "I am Enganar, and I bring a message from Master Oscuro," he grinds out. "He wishes to know if you want peace."

"Of course I want peace," Leroy calls back. "What sane man wouldn't?"

His irony is quite obviously lost on Enganar. "Would you pay a price for peace?" Enganar says, and his grin actually becomes broader and more predatory.

Leroy hesitates. "What price?" he asks suspiciously.

"A simple price," Enganar responds. "If you pay it—if you give it to me—I take it to my master. And my master will cease all hostilities toward you and promise eternal peace."

"What price?" Leroy demands again.

Enganar throws back his head and brays with laughter. "*Her!* Your wife." And he points a sausage-thick finger at Talia.

With blinding speed, Leroy snatches a loaded crossbow from the hands of the nearest guard and levels the weapon at Oscuro's lieutenant. Though his knuckles are white and the weapon trembles, Leroy's voice is steady. "I think you know my answer without asking," he replies coldly. He adjusts his aim. "Or would you like me to drive the point home?"

Enganar laughs again. He reaches behind him and drags out into the open someone you hadn't noticed before. You recognize her at once—it's Tela, one of the warriors who saved you from the alacorn. Without missing a beat, he draws his knife and runs it across the young woman's throat. As the blood gushes, Enganar gestures toward the Enclave's gate. With a tortured scream, the heavy gates tear apart as if they'd been struck by a bullet train. The lieutenant drops Tela's body to the ground at his feet.

Leroy chokes back a cry and fires. The bolt flies true, straight for Enganar's heart ... but falls to the ground an inch from his skin, as if it hit an invisible wall.

Enganar laughs again. "I have your answer, then," he crows. "It will be war. And the Enclave will fall as easily as that gate."

The other guards on the wall loose their arrows and bolts with as little effect. With a final laugh, Enganar turns his back on the Enclave and the delegation withdraws.

On the evening of Enganar's visit to the Enclave, read the following:

You're still amazed at how fast Leroy got himself back under control. Five minutes after Oscuro's delegation left, he was sequestered away in the long house with Gareth, planning the Enclave's defense—troop distribution, logistics, fallback positions, and other large-unit military drek. The sun's gone down and they're still meeting.

No, not any more. Across the darkened compound, you see the door of the long house open and Gareth emerge. He's exhausted, you can see it in every line of his body. Exhausted, and close to despair. He looks like he needs sleep, and you realize that might not be a bad idea. If you're going to war, you may as well be rested.

A scream from the long house shatters the quiet of the night and raises the hair on the back of your neck. It's the scream of a man in hell.

The long house door bursts open and Leroy runs out. "Talia!" he screams. "*No!!*" The young man is struggling to buckle on his sword belt as he sprints for the shattered gate.

HOOKS

Enganar's sacrifice of Tela to power the Ram spell should horrify the runners as thoroughly as it does Leroy and the others. Clearly, Leroy will never give up Talia, and so total war seems inevitable.

BEHIND THE SCENES

THE VISIT

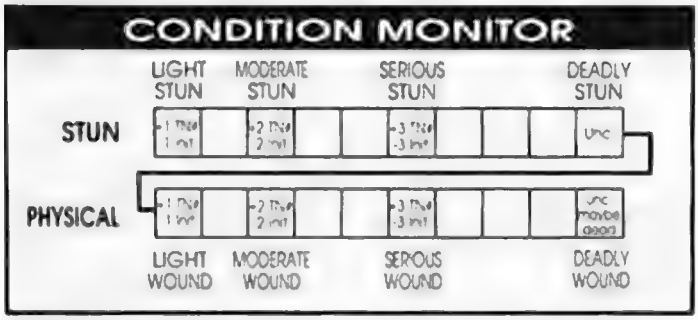
The sole purpose of this delegation from the Collective obviously was to provoke the Enclave into taking hostile action. Oscuro does not know Talia, he only knows of her existence, and assumes that Leroy loves her deeply. He chooses to use this knowledge as a weapon by offering to exchange one precious thing (peace) for another (Talia).

Enganar

As cruel and evil a man as ever walked this Place, Enganar *loves* his job. He's a toxic shaman of no mean skill, who follows the totem of Alacorn. Before approaching the Enclave, he armed himself with a Barrier spell modified to create an invisible shield. In case things get nasty, he's accompanied by a toxic land spirit of Force 4. This spirit only gets into the act if the runners try to attack the lieutenant and his entourage in melee combat. If necessary, Enganar sacrifices one of his bodyguards to boost the force of any spell he casts. His 23 bodyguards are all standard Collective soldiers (see **The Collective's Forces**, p. 45).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
6	4	3	4	6	6	6	6	5	3/4

Initiative: 5 + 1D6 (4D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Skills: Armed Combat 5, Conjuring 6, Etiquette (Enclave) 2, Leadership 3, Magic Theory 4, Sorcery 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Spells: Barrier (Modified) 4 (7), Flamethrower 4 (7), Increase Reflexes (+3) 3 (6), Ram 5 (8)
Gear: Knife (3L), Sword (5M), Vest with Plates (under clothes) (3/4)
Notes: If Enganar "boosts" a spell by taking the life of a donor, use the Force given in parentheses. The Alacorn totem offers no significant Advantages or Disadvantages (much like Coyote).



NIGHTTIME DEPARTURE

Apparently, Leroy intends to charge off into the wilderness and take on the entire Collective single-handedly. If the runners manage to stop him—and if they don't, Gareth certainly will—he immediately blurts out the story.

When he'd finished his meeting with Gareth, Leroy went looking for Talia, but she wasn't in their room. He found only a note reading, "I love you." He immediately understood that she took to heart Oscuro's offer of peace and had decided to sacrifice herself to save the lives of everyone else in the Enclave. And that is exactly how it happened.

Leroy can think of nothing but his love for Talia and his need to save her. Unless Gareth and the runners can convince him otherwise, he charges off into the night in pursuit, hoping against hope to find his wife and rescue her. Of course, Gareth and the runners must successfully convince him to let someone else mount the rescue mission. The team recognizes that without Leroy as its touchstone, the Enclave will cease to exist, leaving its inhabitants at the mercy of Oscuro. While everyone understands Leroy's desire to rescue his wife, he cannot be allowed to risk his own life in the attempt—not even as a part of a larger rescue team.

Much as it pains him, Leroy eventually accepts the logic of this argument. He turns to the runners and begs them to save his wife from Oscuro's clutches, at the same time asking them to understand that he cannot spare any assets to aid them without depleting the Enclave's defenses to a dangerously low level. If they can return Talia to him, he'll give them any reward within his power to bestow.

Finding Talia

If the runners replay the timing in their heads, they realize that Talia might have as much as a three-hour head start (about the length of time from the departure of Enganar to Leroy's discovery that she's left the Enclave). Even if she waited a while before she left, the runners still need to make up a fair chunk of lost time.

None of the Enclave's guards saw Talia go over the wall or slip out the shattered gate. If the runners scout around outside the walls, however, a successful Stealth (4) Test lets a character pick up on her trail, which heads roughly in the direction of what they refer to among themselves as Mount Baker. A single success on a separate Stealth (8) Test tells a character that the trail is less than two hours old.

Once the team picks up the trail and begins to follow it, the characters must make a Stealth (3) Test every ten minutes or so of game time. If they fail to achieve a single success, the team has lost the trail and must make a successful Stealth (5) Test to reacquire it.

About half a kilometer from the Enclave, more footprints join Talia's. The runners can determine that approximately eight unidentified individuals stood here and waited for some time. They may even guess that these tracks belong to a "rear guard" left behind by Enganar in case Talia decided to go over the wall on her own. Under escort by this rear guard, Talia is now moving toward Mount Baker at an average pace of about 5 kilometers per hour.

To complete their mission, the runners must now play catch-up. The gamemaster decides how long this takes based on how hard the players say their characters are pushing themselves. In this terrain, 5 kilometers per hour sets a brisk pace, but not a brutal one. Without magical aid, the fastest the runners can reasonably travel on this broken ground is 7 kilometers per hour. Talia started out 90 minutes ahead of the team, which means they'll catch up with her in about three hours.

Which, coincidentally, is when Talia's escorts plan to take a breather. They choose the bottom of a narrow ravine as a good, defensible place to stop, and cruelly bind Talia hand and foot for their break.

Rescue

When the runners catch up, they find that the leader of the "escort detachment"—a nasty bit of work called Bellaco—set three of his people as sentries, who hunkered down out of sight behind boulders or in crevices in the ravine walls. He and the other four soldiers have decided that their orders from Enganar said only to bring Talia to Oscuro. Those orders said nothing about her condition when they arrived, nor did they forbid the escorts to have a little "fun" with her on the way. When the runners appear on the scene, Bellaco and his four friends are describing to Talia how they'd like her to entertain them.

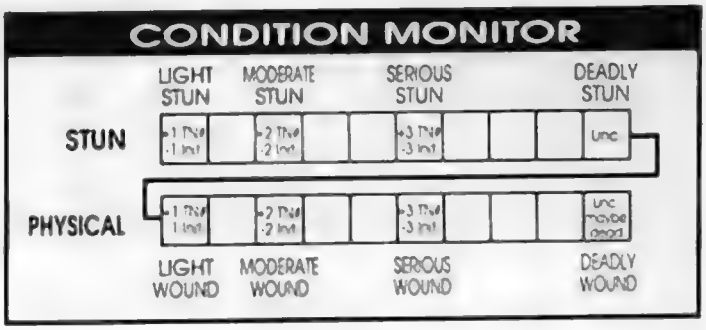
For all of the escorts except Bellaco, use the stats for the standard Collective soldiers (see **The Collective's Forces**, p. 45). All are armed with both bows and swords.

Bellaco

Bellaco looks like a particularly nasty Humanis caricature of his phenotype; nature (or something) exaggerated the characteristics that distinguish him as an elf. He enjoys cruelty for cruelty's sake and exploits every opportunity to humiliate a defeated enemy or anyone else. A hermetic mage, Bellaco uses his knife to draw blood to power his spells. If he believes he may die without the extra power, he tries to kill Talia to boost the Force of a final spell. Oscuro cast Increase +4 Quickness on his lieutenant and Quickened the spell.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
3	7 (11)	4	3	6	4	6	7	6 (8)	3/4

Initiative: 6 (8) + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Grade of Initiation: 2
Skills: Armed Combat 5, Conjuring 3, Leadership 2, Magic Theory 2, Projectile Weapons 5, Sorcery 6, Stealth 1 (Wilderness 3), Unarmed Combat 4
Spells: Hellblast 4 (7), Mana Bolt 3 (6), Stink 2 (5), Control Thoughts 3 (6)
Gear: Medium Crossbow (5M), 12 Bolts, Knife (4L), Sword (6M), Vest with Plates (3/4)
Notes: If Bellaco "boosts" a spell by taking the life of a donor, use the Force in parentheses.



Cleaning Up the Mess

The runners should be able to rescue Talia from Bellaco and his goons and return her to Leroy. The gamemaster may decide how best to handle her undoubtedly emotional homecoming.

The runners might suspect that rescuing Talia completes the task for which they were schlepped to this metaplane. If the runners expect to be transported forthwith to yet another strange locale, they must face disappointment—they've still got work to do. As Gareth points out to them dourly, there's still a war to fight. The fact that Oscuro lost his lever against Leroy—Talia—means that it's only a matter of time before he mounts a major offensive against the Enclave.

DEBUGGING

The runners might decide to make a pre-emptive strike and attack Oscuro's delegation. As long as events transpire in such a way to allow Enganar to deliver his message, the team may feel free to slaughter the delegation or die trying. Delivering the message accomplished the necessary damage.

If the runners guess Talia's reaction to the message and try to counter it, the gamemaster should block their efforts long enough to allow Talia to follow her conscience. For example, if they suggest to Leroy that Talia might sacrifice herself for the Enclave, Leroy dismisses the idea. He argues that the message simply served as a further attempt to sap the Enclave's morale.

The runners may decide that Leroy cannot possibly offer them anything valuable enough to justify them putting their lives on the line for relative strangers, and refuse to rescue Talia. If they need more motivation, Leroy points out that as strangers in this world, they must have been sent here for a reason, and if they cannot state their mission, perhaps rescuing Talia is it. "You can save Talia and the Enclave. That is a noble enough goal for anyone."

If the runners still refuse to rescue Talia, then Leroy and Gareth turn away from them in scorn and spread the word throughout the Enclave that the strangers are cowards and quite possibly traitors; the gamemaster should make their lives quite uncomfortable. The next day, the runners learn that Gareth and Maranda went out during the night to rescue Talia. Maranda died and Gareth took a mortal wound but returned with Leroy's wife. Leroy's community hails Gareth and Maranda as heroes of the Enclave, and the runners' stock drops another couple of notches.

Go to **Leroy's Last Stand**, the next section.

LEROY'S LAST STAND

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

As night begins to shroud this Place, the lookouts on the walls call out a warning. You rush up the ladders to take a look.

There's movement off toward the horizon in the direction of Mount Baker, too far away to make out details, but you know it must be Oscuro's army. You actually feel the Enclave's morale drop another notch, and you're not feeling too happy yourselves. How could Oscuro *possibly* field an army that big? At a guess, at least a thousand warriors just crested the distant rise—a five-to-one manpower advantage.

Oscuro uses sound tactics, you think to yourselves: approaching by night prevents the Enclave from sniping at his forces from a distance. When the sun comes up tomorrow morning, battle will be joined. Will you live to see another sunset?

When the runners actually set eyes on Oscuro, read the following:

There he is, leader of the Collective. Oscuro himself.

You'd visualized a large man, but he's relatively short, built light and slender. But size isn't everything (ask Napoleon)—he exudes an aura of command, of sheer power, that you can feel from here. He apparently sees no need to carry mundane weapons, and wears no armor, only simple leather. On his left wrist sits something that looks like a blood-red hunting falcon wearing a leather hood.

And the instant you see that hooded bird, you know what you're here for. You *need* that leather hood.

When the battle is joined and the runners see Leroy in combat, read the following:

Surrounded by the broken remnants of his personal body-guard, his sword in his hands, Leroy stands like a rock as waves of enemy soldiers break against him. In less than a minute, you watch him survive three assaults that should have completely overwhelmed him. For the fourth time you see him blotted from sight by a mass of Oscuro's warriors. This time he can't possibly survive. ...

But a moment later the mass of humanity parts and Leroy still stands, bleeding from terrible wounds, but still laying about him with his sword. Bodies are piled around him, creating a fortification of flesh. Oscuro's soldiers gather for another charge ... then quail at the look in Leroy's eyes. They stop their advance, and some even step back in fear of that flashing sword.

At that precise moment, a bolt of lightning licks from the crest of a nearby ridge, striking Leroy and transfixing him. For an instant that seems to last an hour he stands with his back arched in pain and his eyes to the heavens. Then he falls heavily and lies still.

As soon as the runners defeat or otherwise disengage from their opponents and check on the fallen Leroy, read the following:

Leroy lies among the bodies of his slain foes, his sword still clutched in his hand. Talia kneels beside him weeping gently, tending to his many wounds ... but you can see that only magic can aid him now. When you look at the wounds on his body, you're amazed he lasted this long.

If one of the runners uses healing magic on Leroy, read the following:

You lean over Leroy's body as he gasps the last breaths of his life. The energy flows through you into him. You feel his power, you shape yours into his. ...

Suddenly, you are sprayed in blood. At first you fear it is your own, a penalty for working magic in this Place, but more power washes over you and you realize that something else is happening. Talia, blood spraying from the dagger she has thrust into her own heart, falls forward onto her husband and across your hands.

Their blood pools together and spills down onto the ground. The hard, rocky earth absorbs the blood and the power of your spell and stains it dark. Not dark red, but the brown of fertile earth. What the frag is going on here?

As you watch, the ground around Leroy's body, watered by his and Talia's blood, begins to change. The rocks dissolve into dust, as if the processes of erosion had sped up a billion-fold. Then the dust changes, transforming into loamy soil. Already, in these few seconds, you see the green spikes of plants emerging from land where nothing would grow before.

And the change spreads, as if his blood and Talia's death acted as a catalyst for a local change, and the results of that change are catalyzing the process further afield. Your skin crawls as the ground shifts beneath your feet, changing in texture and density. You watch with awe as the area of change spreads out from the bodies, the rate of change and expansion increasing the further it extends.

It takes you a moment to consciously hear it, but there's a noise associated with the process, a soft, gentle, chuckling sound—the sound of clear water bubbling over a rocky stream bed. A meter away, a large boulder splits in two, and pure, sparkling water gushes forth, forming a natural spring that washes Leroy's and Talia's bodies clean.

As far away as you can see, the contours of the land subtly change. Red-ocher rock and dust is tinged with the green of new plants. The wasteland is coming alive.

Around you, the new world you helped bring into being fades away, and you realize your personal journey must continue.

HOOKS

In this climactic confrontation, the runners should consider the Enclave doomed ... unless they manage to do something innovative to even the odds.

The end brings sacrifice and redemption, prompted by the healing powers of magic.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners might decide to go over the wall and take the fight to Oscuro's forces, or they may wait through the night with Leroy and his people. The gamemaster should play up the growing sense of desperation felt by the Enclave's people. They know they are massively outnumbered and that their enemies will use the "evil forces" of magic against them. Some regret sticking around when they had the chance to desert the Enclave, and a few entertain desperate thoughts of going over the wall now despite the risk of running into one of Oscuro's patrols.

Leroy refuses to sleep the night before the battle, instead walking through the Enclave like Henry V before the Battle of Agincourt, doing what he can to boost morale and prepare his troops for the morrow. Feel free to play this scene as high tragedy—the doomed "monarch" trying to breathe spirit into his followers.

THE BATTLE

Actually, Oscuro's army contains considerably fewer troops than the characters thought they saw: a good half of his army were actually illusions created to further undermine the morale of the Enclave's forces. The morning shows that Oscuro's army numbers a mere 400 or 500 hundred soldiers.

The gamemaster chooses how to run the battle, but remember that the only combats that need to be played out dice roll by dice roll are those involving the runners. Everything else happens as a dramatic backdrop for the runners' heroics. Because the runners cannot follow every scene of the battle, the gamemaster should find it easy to manipulate events in such a way as to keep the tension high without slaughtering the team out of hand. For example, if the runners seem to be walking all over their opponents, a probing raid by Oscuro's forces may threaten to overwhelm them. If the runners find themselves about to be killed and gutted, a counterattack by Enclave troops may save them in the nick of time.

The ebb and flow of battle should—subtly, of course—give the runners a clear view of Oscuro commanding his forces. When they spot the "falcon" on his wrist, they realize that they came to this metaplane to retrieve the bird's leather hood. Obviously, this requires them to get close to Oscuro. And it should seem equally obvious that a direct assault is doomed to fail. The player characters must create and execute their own plan to obtain the hood.

Fighting Oscuro

Oscuro commands the Collective's forces from the top of a nearby ridge, protected by a personal bodyguard of four standard Collective soldiers plus Enganar (see **The Price of Peace**, p. 48) and any surviving troll delegates from **Delegation**, p. 45. All these soldiers stand prepared to give their lives to save their commander.

If the runners manage to approach Oscuro, the small man unhoods his "falcon" and sends it against his attackers—at which point they discover that the falcon is actually a tiny local variant of an eyekiller! When he looses the eyekiller, Oscuro discards the leather hood, unaware of its importance to the team. In this situation, they might be able to acquire the hood without actually fighting Oscuro.

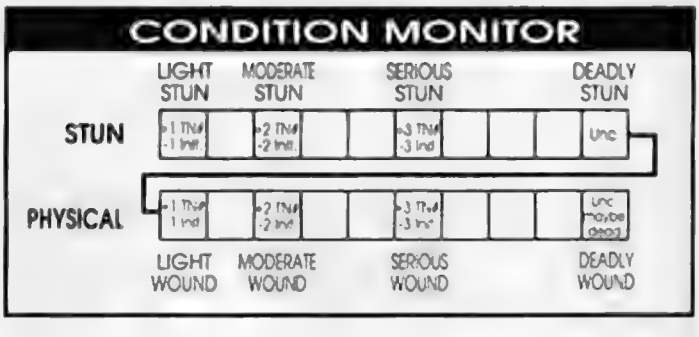
Oscuro rarely uses donors to "boost" his magic because he rarely needs to augment his awesome powers. If necessary, however, he willingly sacrifices any number of his bodyguards.

If pressed beyond hope of winning, Oscuro reveals his true nature in an effort to give himself an edge. Oscuro's statistics and complete description appear in **Debugging**, p. 53.

Local Eyekiller

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
3	5 x 4	1	—	2/5	2	(6)	5	5L

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/4
Powers: Electrical Projection, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Amplified Hearing)
Commentary: This variant of the eyekiller is comparable in size to a hawk, about 35 centimeters long with a wingspan of almost a meter. Its electrical projection power packs the same punch as that of the full-sized bird. Once free of its hood, the eyekiller attacks anyone who it perceives to be threatening its master. If wounded, it tries to save itself.



VICTORY

If the runners manage to destroy or drive off Oscuro, his well-coordinated army dissolves into chaos. While some soldiers continue to fight, most turn tail and flee at the first opportunity. The Enclave's soldiers easily mop up the remaining pockets of resistance.

SACRIFICE

As soon as the runners remember that they saw Leroy felled by a magical attack, they can find him laying on the battlefield near Gareth's mangled body. Talia kneels at his side and tends his injuries, but it is clear that Leroy will die very soon.

One of the magician player characters could, and probably should, try to save him using healing magic. When they attempt this action, read them the final section of **Tell It to Them Straight**, p. 50.

Talia's sacrifice catches the runners by surprise. She is not acting according to any prearranged plan or out of despair at losing her husband; she is obviously responding to an unconscious understanding of the unique role she must play in the ritual that will allow this Place to be reborn. They witness the transformation of the wasteland catalyzed by Leroy's and Talia's mingled blood and the healing magic—a suitable symbol to end a symbolic adventure. If the runners acquired the eyekiller's hood, they now move from this Place to the next. If they somehow fail to get the hood, they move on to the next Place with the knowledge that they have fallen short of their goal.

DEBUGGING

The runners might decide to take the fight to Oscuro rather than waiting for his army to arrive. That's okay. If they ask Leroy in a persuasive enough fashion to supply them with some troops for this strike, he might agree to meet their request. (Naturally, Gareth will be present at any such discussion, and certainly will offer some pithy comments on the tactical soundness of the team's suggestions.)

In this version of events, the team meets Oscuro's vanguard only a couple of kilometers away from the Enclave—it seems Oscuro was planning to assault the settlement regardless of how things turned out with Talia. When the fight is at its worst and it looks as though the runners may go down in defeat, Leroy shows up at the head of a relief force. The events in **Sacrifice** unfold as described in that section.

If the runners decide to avoid the battle altogether, the gamemaster must weave together some sequence of events to bring them into contact with Oscuro and the hood.

If no reasonable way presents itself to get the runners back on track, then move on to the next adventure, **A Fistful of Karma**, p. 54. Let the players know during the transition between Places that they failed to achieve their goal in this one. They receive opportunities to make up for their mistake later.

Make all Karma Awards at the end of the entire **Harlequin's Back** adventure.

OSCURO

Oscuro represents the local manifestation of Darke, the player characters' immediate opposition and avatar of the Enemy, though the runners will not realize this yet. Killing Darke in this Place does not harm the "real" Darke. In this manifestation, Darke may shift at will between two forms.

He prefers to appear as a small, slightly built human—handsome in a cruel way, with short, dark hair, piercing blue-gray eyes, and an aquiline nose. In this form, the only weapon he ever carries is a small knife which actually serves as a Rating 4 weapon focus. He rarely appears without his hooded "falcon," actually a local variant of the eyekiller, on his wrist.

Oscuro's *true* form is something absolutely horrific: an amorphous, multi-limbed, shifting shape with dozens of protrusions that might be eyes. It cannot talk in this form, but it can cast spells normally and can even wield its knife using a specialized fighting-limb. Also in this form, its top speed peaks at almost twice that of a running man, and it reeks of rotting meat.

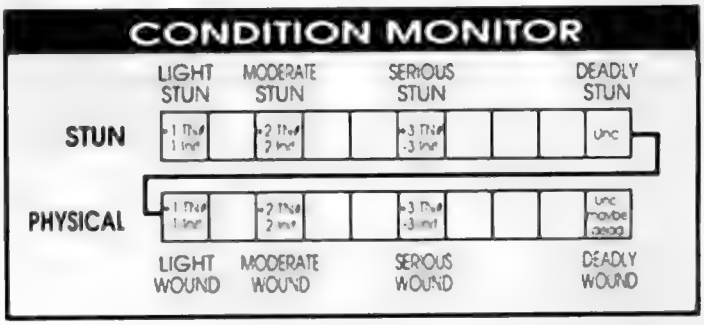
If Oscuro assumes his true form, the morale of his army immediately suffers. Soldiers remain with their units out of fear, but no longer possess the discipline they showed a moment earlier. For this reason, Oscuro assumes his true form only in dire emergency.

Oscuro is a Grade 4 Initiate.

The statistics to the left of the slash represent Oscuro in his human form; the numbers to the right of the slash refer to his true form.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
6/9	8/11	4/8	4/—	5/5	4/4	6/(6)	8/8	4/6	0/2/(1/4)

Initiative: 6 + 1D6/8 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 7/4
Skills: Armed Combat 8, Conjuring 3, Etiquette (Enclave) 3, Leadership 6, Magic Theory 3, Sorcery 6, Unarmed Combat 6
Gear: Knife [4L/8L, Weapon Focus (4)], Leather Clothing (0/2)
Spells: Animate 4 (7), Chaotic World 5 (8), Death Touch 2 (5), Fire Strike 4 (7), Hellblast 3 (6), Ignite 2 (5), Increase Quickness (+4) 6 (9), Mob Mind 3 (6), Mob Mood 4 (7), Power Bolt 5 (8), Spectacle 5 (8), Thunderclap 4 (7)
Notes: If Oscuro boosts a spell by taking the life of a donor, use the Force in parentheses.



A FISTFUL OF KARMA

"This thing of being a hero, about the main thing to do is to know when to die. Prolonged life has ruined more men than it ever made."

—Will Rogers (1949)

OVERVIEW

Steampunk cowboys with magical implants? Trolls firing six-guns from the backs of dinosaurs? This metaplane is one weird Place, chummers!

In **A Fistful of Karma**, the runners find themselves in a fantastic version of the Old West, their cyberware and magic transformed to fit the strange laws of this reality. The conflicts and challenges they face during this adventure are unblushingly drawn from several classic "horse operas." The shadowrunners must save a town from a sinister outlaw's return and eliminate an even more lethal danger lurking in its midst. Depending on the number of shadowrunners involved and the gamemaster's inclination, this adventure may be the story of a lone champion (reminiscent of *Shane*, *High Noon*, or the adventures of the Lone Ranger or Cisco Kid), or it may pit a small band of heroes against desperate odds (in the manner of *The Magnificent Seven* or *Silverado*).

So saddle up, pardner, and be sure to wind your cyberware.

STEVE BRYANT 1994

INTO THE WEST

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The currents of the metaplanes draw you in a hundred directions at once, twisting flesh and spirit in ways they were never meant to go. Even the magicians are howling as you all fall through realms of astral space that their senses have never touched. Slowly, the clouds of indescribable color swirling around you fade to a dusty, tan haze.

Shaking your head to clear your vision, you look around. Rolling hill country extends to the horizon in front of you. Over your shoulder, you see a majestic line of haze-shrouded mountains.

As your vision clears, awareness of your body trickles back to you. Your tortured muscles throb in an uneven, plodding rhythm as you sway gently on the back of ... a horse? You're riding a Nuke-It Burger on the hoof? Too weird, chummer! And what happened to your chrome?! Where'd this clumsy-looking metal arm come from, all rivets and ratchets hanging off your shoulder? The nearby troll riding a scaled-down tyrannosaurus looks almost normal by comparison.

HOOKS

The runners have ended up in a Place closer to Kansas (as in, "Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore"), but one unlike any Kansas they've ever been to, let alone hallucinated. Let the player characters learn the strange and nasty rules of this Place mistake by mistake, blunder by blunder—and enjoy watching them do it.

If you can find the soundtrack to the film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, play it in the background. Subtlety ain't the name of the game 'round these parts.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The atmosphere of the Place for this adventure can best be described as "cowpunk." The shadowrunners are transformed into typical inhabitants of a Place that resembles the Old West, but with clockwork cyberware, metahumans, and magic thrown in.

CHARACTER MODIFICATIONS (MUNDANE)

Before the gamemaster runs this adventure, he must help the players transform their shadowrunner characters into proper cowpunks. Players and gamemaster should keep in mind the following important points about this process:

·Transformed cyberware gives the wearer the same scores, skills, Attributes, and so on that it does in the "real" **Shadowrun** world. Cyberware that does not transform simply ceases to exist, and the characters lose whatever benefits or abilities it gives them.

·Everyone retains his or her race: elves stay elves, trolls stay trolls, and so on.

·Characters and their gear should change to fit the punked-out, Old West metaphor. The look, feel, and (of course) fun are the most important things to keep in mind when determining the changes.

Attributes

Unmodified Physical and Mental Attributes remain unchanged (unlike just about everything else).

Skills

Most skills remain the same, though some, such as computer skills, become utterly useless on this metaplane. Other skills are transformed as described below.

A character's highest Vehicle Skill becomes his Riding Skill. If a character actually has Riding Skill, add that Skill Rating to his highest Vehicle Skill to determine his Riding Skill on this metaplane. Any character with a vehicle control rig gains additional bonuses when riding (see **Vehicles**, following). Similarly, the Whips/Flails Skill or Monofilament Whip Skill transforms into skill with a bullwhip.

Specializations and concentrations in weapons from the real world also apply to the transformed weapon the character is carrying. For example, a character with Firearms (Ares Predator) Skill of 8 might now have Firearms (Colt .44 Dragoon) Skill of 8.

In general, skills that allow a character to do something in 2055 will allow him to do an equivalent thing if an equivalent exists on this metaplane. For example, someone with Maglock Skill can pick locks here, and someone with medical skills can use the medical technology available on this plane. For social dealings with the local folks, use a player character's highest Etiquette Skill Rating.

Cyberware

A typical street samurai in 2055 has a cyberarm, most likely equipped with fighting spurs or a built-in smartgun. He carries wired reflexes, an eye stuffed full of fancy optics, and probably armor implants, plus a heavy autopistol hanging at his hip and an assault rifle in his hands. His working clothes consist of street leathers and battle dress uniforms (BDUs). In this Place, that same samurai will have a bulky metal arm powered by magically enhanced clockwork. His hand becomes an articulated gauntlet that he can replace with a

snap-on six-shooter or a blade. He winds his implants up with a key. The cyberoptics change into a flat, metal box riveted in front of one eye, containing a set of revolving lenses that seem to be made from faceted crystals. Dermal armor turns into rippling patches of brilliantly scaled snakeskin covering the samurai's torso, and he wears a six-shooter holstered in a gunbelt around his waist. In place of leathers and BDUs he wears a Stetson or sombrero, neckerchief, denim workshirt, jeans, possibly chaps, boots, and spurs. Quite a sight, ain't he?

This metaplane's reality allows the existence of some cyberware, but its form and function are based on fantasy-Victorian technology and a hefty dose of magic. It is impossible to describe the changes in detail for every piece of cyberware in **Shadowrun**. Ideally, the following guidelines and examples will allow the gamemaster and players to decide how cybered characters look and how their equipment works.

Certain cyberware does not transform, and simply ceases to exist on this metaplane. This category includes all datajacks, softlinks, and skillwires; all communications cyberware; all headware memory, including encephalons, tactical computers, and internal cyberdecks; and all gene-tech. Any advantages provided by this cyberware are not available to the player character during this adventure.

Power Sources: Cyberlimbs, wired reflexes, and similar devices require mechanical energy to function on this metaplane. If the user does not use any special powers or bonuses, cyberlimbs can function for an indefinite period without recharging. For example, a player character with a normal Strength of 4 can use his cyberarm at Strength 4 for days without exhausting significant power. However, if he uses the arm's augmented Strength, then he needs lots of energy.

Such cyberware gets its power from magical clockwork, wound up with a large key inserted in a socket in the character's breastbone. When fully wound up, the clockwork operates for a number of Combat Turns equal to the character's unaugmented Body Attribute. Winding the works is a Complex Action. To wind up his or her cyberware, a player character must make a Strength Test against a Target Number 4. Every success achieved winds the clockwork enough to power all the relevant cyberware for 1 Combat Turn. This dice roll allows a character to use multiple cyberware systems; for example, characters with wired reflexes and cyberlimbs can use all those systems in the same turn while expending only 1 Combat Turn's worth of energy.

Stored energy is depleted only when the character uses his augmented scores. For example, if a character winds up his clockwork with 4 Combat Turns' worth of energy, he might use his cyberware for 2 Combat Turns and then wait awhile before using the other 2 turns' worth, after which he needs to wind up the works again in order to use the augmented powers.

Cyberlimbs: Cyberlimbs transform into something resembling medieval armor, with additional touches of Victorian technology such as neat rows of rivets, polished brass fittings, hydraulic pistons. The usual hand attachment

for a cyberarm resembles a finely articulated gauntlet, which can hold and manipulate anything that a human hand can: a gun, a rope, the reins of a horse, and so on. A hand can be removed with one Complex Action and replaced (requiring another Complex Action) with another attachment. If a player character has cyberware that would logically transform into a hand attachment (e.g., a smartgun link or retractable spurs) but does not have a cyberarm, that character gets a cyberarm with +0 Strength for this adventure.

Available attachments include a Knife Hand, Sword Hand, and Gun Hand. A Knife Hand does (Str + 1)L damage in combat; hand razors transform into a Knife Hand. A Sword Hand does (Str + 3)M damage in combat; spurs transform into a Sword Hand. A Gun Hand is a heavy pistol attached to the cyberarm and normally reduces the target number for

shots by 1. When used in conjunction with a Smartgun lens (see **Cyberoptics**, below), it becomes the equivalent of a smartgun link, reducing the target number for shots by 2.

Cyberoptics: All cyberoptics transform into various lenses ground from magically charged crystals. The color of the crystal indicates its function. For example, normal vision lenses are clear, Flare Compensation lenses are green, Low-Light Vision lenses are smoky gray, Smartgun lenses are blue, Telescopic Vision lenses are amber, and Thermographic Vision lenses are red. When the Smartgun lens is used with a Gun Hand, it reduces target numbers for firearms by 2. When used with any other handgun or rifle, it reduces the target number by 1.

The different lenses are mounted in a brass housing riveted over the character's eye socket. Rotating a lens into place requires a Complex Action, and only one lens may be in place at any one time.

Any player character with a smartgun link gets a cyberoptic equipped with the smartgun lens, whether or not he wore a cybereye on the physical plane. However, a character firing a Gun Hand but using a lens other than the Smartgun lens does not receive the full smartgun bonus.

Animal Bonds: All bioware and cyberware that augments a character's Body or the function of muscles or internal organs transforms into an animal bond. An animal bond is a portion of some symbolically appropriate animal that has been magically grafted into the shadowrunner's body. Dermal armor, for example, most often becomes pieces of colorful snakeskin. Muscle implants most often transform into the rippling muscles of the tiger, covered in tawny, striped fur. Pretty much any carnivore will do for most enhancements. Such exotic abilities as water breathing would require rippling gills like a shark's; the flicking tongue of a snake might represent such enhancements as a chemical analyzer. (Say, he really *does* speak with forked tongue!)

Characters with animal bonds must consume great quantities of fresh meat to keep the bonds functioning. If a player character with an animal bond goes for 24 hours without gorging on several pounds of meat, his bond becomes dormant and he loses its benefits until he can eat properly again. Apart from this requirement, the cyberware or bioware functions exactly as it does in the "real" **Shadowrun** world.

Appearance

Though every character still looks more or less like himself, the details of his or her appearance can change considerably. In addition to changes in appearance caused by transformed cyberware, the player characters' clothes also change. The personal styles of the shadowrunners come into play in this transformation; if a character is a meticulous dresser on the physical plane, he will be tricked out in equivalent duds here. Two-gun rigs, shoulder holsters, decorations on firearms, saddles, and the like are all up to the players.

The bad news is that body armor does not transform. Nothing stands between the runners and hostile fire except their own tender hides (and any dermal armor they may possess).

Players can also be creative in selecting the animal bonds that represent certain cyber implants. Let folks get as creative as they like in fleshing out the details of their characters' appearance and costume.

Gear and Money

Some equipment has no counterpart on this plane and therefore does not exist for this adventure. Every player character also gets certain basic pieces of equipment, whether he or she possessed its equivalent on the physical plane or not.

On this metaplane, virtually everyone owns a gunbelt with a holster. Most professionals' gunbelts are also equipped with loops or a pouch that can hold up to twelve bullets for reloading, but the average citizen's gunbelt does not have this feature. Characters may also wear shoulder holsters, but these offer no reload pouch. The gamemaster should let players decide what kind of gun leather their characters carry.

This adventure does not require a massive shopping expedition to gear up. In fact, if the runners act heroically, they will find friendly locals willing to provide whatever they need. Still, everyone needs some pocket change from time to time. Have each player roll 2D6; the result represents the amount of local dollars his character is carrying in assorted bills and coin. All costs listed in this section refer to dollars.

Firearms

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Holdout weapons become derringers, such as the Remington .41 two-shot pistol. Light pistols become light

FIREARMS TABLE

Pistols	Type	Conceal	Ammo	Dmg	Wt	Cost
Derringer	HO	9	2(b)	4M	.25	5
Light Revolver	LP	4	6(cy)	6M	1	10
Heavy Revolver	HP	3	6(cy)	8M	1.5	12
Rifles						
Carbine	AR	2	8(m)	6M	3	6
Light Rifle	AR	—	16(m)	8M	4	12
Heavy Rifle	SR	—	16(m)	8S	5	15
Shotgun	SH	—	2(b)	9Sf	5	8
Scattergun	HP	3	2(b)	8Sf	3	7

revolvers, like the Colt Navy .36 or Smith & Wesson .32 "Model 2." Heavy pistols become heavy revolvers, like Colt's Dragoon .44 or Peacemaker .45, or the Smith & Wesson Frontier .44-40. SMGs are transformed into light rifles or carbines (gamemaster's choice). Assault rifles and LMGs are transformed into heavy rifles. These rifles are all lever-action weapons with built-in magazines, like the Henry .44 or Winchester 73-inch .44-40. Heavier weapons, such as the Vindicator or assault cannons, also become heavy rifles (sorry, no Gatling guns available in this adventure).

Smartguns transform into a Gun Hand. No matter what the actual gun's former shape was, it becomes a heavy revolver. The Mode for all weapons is Single Shot (see p. 92, **SRII**). Availability does not apply, as all these weapons can be purchased easily in town.

Ammo

Two kinds of bullets are available in this Place: standard ball ammo and enchanted silver bullets called argents. Characters can easily obtain ball ammo in the appropriate calibers for different weapons at any general store, but standard rounds are next to useless against most magical beings and defenses. Argents allow the characters to successfully conduct normal ranged combat against elementals and other beings with Immunity against Normal Weapons, and they can also breach the magical armor that protects many creatures against conventional bullets. Among his possessions, every player character will find three argent rounds for each weapon he owns. A single argent round costs the same as a box of standard ammunition. Costs in dollars for conventional ammo are listed on the table.

Melee Weapons

Melee weapons on this metaplane do not reflect any of the augmentation or techno-wizardry they offer on the physical plane. Weapon foci do not transform, but retain their original shape and offer all normal bonuses in combat.

Knives become bowies; throwing blades and shuriken become throwing knives. Swords become machetes or cavalry sabers (gamemaster's choice), though a dapper shadowrunner who ends up looking like a real "dude" might carry a sword cane. Clubs, saps, and batons all transform into simple clubs. All whips become 4-meter-long bullwhips. Game statistics for available melee weapons appear on the table below; as with firearms, Availability does not apply.

AMMUNITION COST TABLE

Ammunition (Box of 50)	Cost
Light Pistol	2
Heavy Pistol	3
Derringer	3
Carbine/Lt. Rifle	4
Heavy Rifle	5

Vehicles

No matter what you drive on the physical plane, on this metaplane you ride something with legs. Every transformed character rides on some kind of steed. Humans, elves, and orks ride horses. Dwarfs are too short to comfortably ride horses, and so they ride somewhat slower ponies. Trolls, too heavy for horses, ride 2-meter-tall dinosaurs called thunderfeet. Game statistics for each type of mount appear on the Riding Animals Table.

Each class of mount also comes with an appropriate standard saddle, equipped with saddlebags and straps to hold equipment such as lariats and rifle scabbards.

Any character carrying an implanted vehicle control rig on the physical plane possesses a special affinity for riding beasts on this metaplane. The rider retains his usual initiative bonuses when riding, and increases his mount's base Quickness by the level of his vehicle control rig. For example, a rigger with a Level 2 Vehicle Control Rig riding a horse adds 4 + 3D6 to his initiative while mounted; the horse's Quickness becomes 6 x 4.

During travel over long distances, a mount can sustain a movement rate of

MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

Weapon	Conceal	Reach	Dmg.	Wt.	Cost
Bowie	6	—	(Str)L	.5	5
Bullwhip	4	3	(Str)L*	1	5
Cavalry Saber	2	1	(Str + 2)M	2.5	10
Machete	4	1	(Str + 1)M	3	3
Sword Cane	6**	1	(Str + 1)M	2	20
Throwing Knife	8	—	(Str)L	.25	3

*Bullwhips can also entangle a target. The attacker must try to make an entangling attack; if his Armed Combat Test is successful, he yanks the target off his feet. The victim may make a Strength or Quickness Test against the attacker's Bullwhip Skill to stay standing. Increase this target number by the number of extra successes the attacker rolled in his Armed Combat Test.

**The Concealability of the sword cane is the target number for Perception Tests to notice that it is a sword cane rather than a walking stick. If a character tries to hide a sword cane on his person, its Concealability is 2.

twice its base Quick-ness in kilometers per hour for up to 10 hours a day. A horse has a base Quickness of 4, and so can travel 8 kph, or 80 kilometers in a full day at normal speed. Player characters may, of course, spur their mounts to move faster. A mount's running speed in kilometers per hour works out to 1.2 times its running movement for one Combat Turn. A horse's running movement is 4 x 4, which equals 16, and so a galloping horse can go 19.2 kph. To calculate speed per minute, simply multiply the running movement by 20; the result is the distance in meters. A horse can gallop 320 meters in a minute (4 x 4 = 16, 16 x 20 = 320).

RIDING ANIMALS TABLE

Mount	B	Q	S	I	W	R	Attacks
Horse	10	4 x 4	8	2/3	2	3*	6S, +1 Reach
Pony	9	3 x 4	6	2/3	2	3*	4S, +1 Reach
Thunderfoot	14	3 x 4	12	1/3	1	4*	10S, +2 Reach

*This Reaction applies when the beast is not being ridden. When mounted, the animal reacts with its rider's Reaction. Thunderfeet react with their rider's Reaction – 1.

However, a mount can only gallop safely for a number of minutes equal to the mount's Body. After that time, it begins to tire. Riding Tests can be made against the mount's Willpower to let its rider force the animal to gallop for an additional number of minutes equal to half the mount's Body (1/2 Body). The rider must make a successful Riding Test against the target number +2 for each additional (1/2 Body) minutes the mount gallops. If the rider fails a Riding Test, the animal drops to a trot (half its running speed). It refuses to gallop again until it has traveled for at least an hour at a slower pace or rested completely for half an hour.

In addition, a galloping animal suffers damage from fatigue. Each additional (1/2 Body) minutes at a gallop does 6M Stun damage to the animal, which it resists with Body. If it is galloping when it hits D level damage, it will fall, possibly injuring the rider.

Mounted Combat: With a few changes, combat on a mount resembles a low-speed fight between vehicles (for purposes of this adventure, anyway). A mount's Handling Rating is 6 minus its Intelligence Rating; a horse has Handling 4 (6 – 2) and a thunderfoot Handling 5 (6 – 1). If the mount is fatigued or wounded, add the appropriate modifier to the rider's target number when making Riding Tests.

In the event of a crash, the mount falls, and both horse and rider take the damage indicated on the Impact Table (p. 107, **SRII**). Unlike vehicles, mounts do not provide riders with cover or protection. Damage to the "vehicle" means the mount is wounded.

CHARACTER MODIFICATIONS (MAGIC)

Magic on this plane suffers severe restrictions. All magic that functions on this metaplane is assigned to one of the four elements: Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. Shamans and mages alike will find themselves restricted to an affinity for one or more elements.

Certain magical powers do not function at all on this metaplane, including sorcery, other than the elemental magic described below; astral perception; metamagic (initiates cannot monitor their magical energies astrally as required for meta-magical processes); summoning (the spirits on this metaplane cannot be summoned by the powers of magicians); and locked or quickened spells (they do not accompany the magician on to the metaplane, and the character loses their benefits for this adventure).

In addition, certain magic is less effective and/or works differently on this plane. Bound elementals cannot be called; any allied or free spirits who accompany the shadowrunners must manifest physically all the time. Like the player characters, the spirits cannot use astral perception. While power and weapon foci transform and operate normally on this metaplane, retaining all their usual bonuses in combat, no other foci transform, and they are not available to the magician during this adventure. Enchanting Skill exists on this metaplane, but differs sufficiently from Enchanting on the physical plane that to all intents and purposes, the player characters cannot use the skill in this Place.

The following pages offer guidelines for using various forms of magic on this metaplane.

Elemental Affinity

Most magicians on this metaplane can use only one of the four magical elements. Hermetic adepts are automatically limited to their chosen elemental affinity. Shamanic adepts are limited to the element that most closely corresponds to their totem's habitat: air for Spirits of the Sky, earth for Spirits of the Land, fire for Spirits of Man, and water for Spirits of the Sea.

Fully capable mages and shamans (as opposed to hermetic and shamanic adepts) make random die rolls to determine which element(s) they can manipulate in this Place. Players should roll four dice, one at a time, assigning each die to a specific element as they roll it. The element associated with the highest die roll result is the element the magician can use. If the die roll for two or more elements is tied, the player can choose which of those elements his character will use. For example, a player controlling a mage rolls a 5 for the element of air, a 2 for earth, a 3 for fire, and a 2 for water. The air die shows the highest result, and so his element for this adventure is air. This means that the character can only perform air magic. If the player had rolled a 5 for fire as well as for air, he could choose either fire or air magic.

A magician can use any element for which he rolls a 6. For example, a player who rolls a 6 for fire, a 4 for water, a 5 for air, and 6 for earth can use both fire and earth magic.

As an advantage of their skill and knowledge, initiates can reroll individual dice when determining their elemental affinity, one die for each grade of initiation. The player may divide his rerolls among his dice as he wishes. If the magician in the first example above is a Grade 4 initiate who prefers fire magic, he can reroll the fire die up to four times in an attempt to tie or beat the high result of the air die. He may also choose to reroll the air die in an attempt to get a result less than or equal to 3; if he succeeds, the result of the fire die becomes the highest result. He can also allot his 4 rerolls to different dice and attempt to roll sixes in order to use multiple elements.

Physical Adepts

With the exception of astral perception, all of a physical adept's powers transform intact. They may use all their abilities in exactly the same manner as on the physical plane, with identical results.

Sorcery

A magic user on this metaplane has only a few spells available. For any elemental affinity he possesses, he can either use an attack spell or manifest the element. Magicians can cast any of these spells with a Force up to twice their Magic Attribute, subject to Physical Drain if the Force exceeds the Magic Attribute. Standard spellcasting rolls apply (see p. 129, **SRII**), but offensive magic on this metaplane is aimed physically. This means that targets of attack spells may use Combat Pool or Magic Pool dice to augment their Resistance Tests. Targets cannot use both Dice Pools simultaneously; they may use Combat Pool dice to "dodge" the spell effect, or they can use Magic Pool dice to block the magical energy.

Attack spells function like combat spells. The target resists them using Body, duration is Instantaneous, range is line of sight, and Drain is (Force/2)M.

Attack spells have no effect on an elemental spirit of the same element; for example, a fire attack spell has no effect on fire elementals. However, these spells do increased damage against elementals of the opposed type; for example, water spells do increased damage to fire elementals. Attack spells do normal damage to elementals of the other two types. Both increased and normal damage are listed (following) for each type of attack spell.

Manifest spells offer non-combat applications for the element in question (see the listed manifest spells for examples). Most have sustained duration, operate at Touch or Self range, and have Drain (Force/2)L even if the manifest effects mimic a normal spell with a higher Drain.

Air Attack: The magician hurls a blast of hurricane-force air, doing (Force)S Physical damage with the elemental effect of blast. This spell has no effect on air elementals, but does (Force)D damage to earth elementals.

Air Manifest: The magician can create a cloud of breathable air in any environment: underwater, in a smoke- or gas-filled area, even a sealed chamber. The radius of the cloud is equal to the Force of the spell in meters, and the air within that volume stays fresh for a number of minutes equal to the number of successes achieved by the magician against a Target Number 4. The magician can also levitate to a height equal to the spell's Force in meters while carrying up to his full carrying capacity. Treat this effect as a levitate person spell with a range of Self.

Earth Attack: The magician hurls a bolt of jagged elemental earth that does (Force)S Physical damage to fire and water elementals and (Force)D damage to air elementals. This bolt also acts as a ram spell (p.151, **SRII**).

Earth Manifest: The magician can create a solid barrier of earth (treat as a barrier spell, p. 158, **SRII**). He can also extend this effect to form a meter-wide bridge or ramp, with a length equal to his Magic Rating in meters. The ramp or bridge remains stable as long as one end stays in contact with rock or soil.

Fire Attack: The magician hurls a bolt of fiery energy that does (Force)S Physical damage and has the elemental effect of fire. The spell does (Force)D damage against water elementals.

Fire Manifest: The magician can manifest light (same effect as the light spell, p.158, **SRII**), produce warmth (treat as light spell, but the effect is a comfortable warmth in any ambient temperature rather than visible light), and light fires (treat as the ignite spell, p. 158, **SRII**; however, the spell cannot be used against living targets, their garments, or their equipment).

Water Attack: The magician hurls a stream of steaming water that does (Force)S Physical damage with the elemental effect of acid. The spell has no effect on water elementals, but does (Force)D damage to fire elementals.

Water Manifest: The magician can create drinkable water, providing 1 liter of water for every success achieved against the spell's Target Number of 4. This spell has a Permanent effect. The manifest water spell can put out fires, extinguishing burning material equivalent to the spell's Force in square meters for every success rolled against Target Number 6.

Conjuring

Player characters may only use Conjuring Skill in this metaplane to banish elementals of the magician's own affinity. For example, a magician with a fire affinity can only banish fire elementals. In all other respects, conjuring works like standard banishing (p. 143, **SRII**). If the elemental target of the banishing spell is working in partnership with humans or other beings, the elemental's allies will try to slaughter the banishing magician by crude means (guns, axes, pointed sticks) while he is busy attempting to exorcise their buddy. Would-be exorcists are therefore advised to bring along backup.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The plot in **A Fistful of Karma** advances in two ways. Certain events occur within a timetable and will happen regardless of the player characters' actions. The way they react to these events, however, can change conditions later in the timetable, and the runners' handling of these situations is crucial to the eventual outcome of the story. Certain other events only occur when the player characters go to a particular place or places. The runners can freely explore the town and valley, hopefully doing a little legwork to increase their chances of figuring out what is going on.

The central action of the story unfolds over three days. On the third day at high noon (of course), the beleaguered sheriff of Valley Hope will confront the villains. Without the shadowrunners' help, he will fail and most likely die. If the runners pitch in, the town stands a chance of staying free. But behind this surface challenge lies a darker secret. Deep in the shaft of the old Flattop Mine lurks a mysterious man named Trey, the puppet master who pulls the strings on heroes, villains, and innocent bystanders. Ultimately, the player characters must defeat Trey in order to obtain one of his bones to use as the Songbird's perch.

ABOUT THE OPPOSITION

The villains in this adventure are powerful individuals attempting to take over a region with a population of about 200 people. Such a task requires a certain amount of manpower, and so the runners can expect to encounter three types of opposition.

At the top of the danger heap stand the principal villains, Sy Vants and his hired gun, Dred Francis. Either of these NPCs make more than a match for the typical player character. As far as gunfights and other confrontations are concerned, Vants calls everyone else's shots; all of the more-or-less faceless gunslingers that the player characters confront are working for him. The least dangerous are the unmodified cowpokes, normal people with slightly-above-average combat skills. In a one-on-one fight, most shadowrunners can wipe out a force of cowpokes in a few Combat Turns. Vants may call on an almost unlimited supply of cowpokes.

Much more deadly are the "cowpunks," NPCs fitted up with cyberware who are dangerous in combat. Player characters who take on a standup fight against cowpunks at even odds may have bitten off more than they can chew, and so the gamemaster should usually put no more than one cowpunk per two shadowrunners into any given fight scene. Vants employs six cowpunks: three humans, two trolls, and a very nasty elf.

Encounters in which the opposition appears in apparently overwhelming force are not intended as fight scenes, though player characters have been known to plunge into impossible fights and win against all odds. If the runners decide to perform such outlandish heroics, the gamemaster must debug the plot line as best he can.

TACTICAL HINTS

Though the bullets in this Place hit a little softer than in the player characters' "real" world, keep in mind that this Place does not offer body armor, either. A hit that wouldn't even faze someone wearing an armor jacket can be deadly here. Also, though few NPCs possess magical ability in this adventure, magic is less potent here, and so the ability to wield it gives the player characters less of an overwhelming advantage than in a run on the physical plane.

VALLEY HOPE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

After the runners have surveyed the land, read the following:

You've been moseying along the narrow paths through the hills for a couple of hours now. The sun's high, and your mounts maintain an easy pace in the heat of the day. As you crest a hill, you hear the crack of shootin' irons. Downslope, you see a contraption that looks like an old-style steam train chugging along a broad, dusty road. Somehow, you all know it's called a landsteamer.

The engineer must have it stoked up real high; the thing's bellowing smoke and running almost twice as fast as the usual speed for a steamer. As the train rounds a curve, the three cars behind the engine rock from side to side like a sidewinder with a broken back.

Now you see why the steamer is making so much speed; a dozen rannies come whoopin' around the bend after it, firing at any passengers brave enough or dumb enough to show their faces out the back of the last car. A few tough ones are returning the outlaws' fire, but as you watch, one of them lets out a holler and falls back into the car.

Suddenly a section of the road a hundred meters in front of the train erupts into a blocky figure of dirt and stone, taller than the engine bearing down on it. It spreads its squarish arms, and the dirt of the road bubbles and seethes in front of it. The steamer screams as its engineer pulls hard on the brakes. Behind the engine, the pursuing riders begin to close the gap.

Read the following once the characters head off toward town, with or without the landsteamer:

The road straightens out as it reaches the valley floor. Rich prairie land lies to either side. After about three hours' ride, you see the buildings of a small town among the gently rolling, grassy hills.

If the shadowrunners are not riding alongside the landsteamer, read the following:

You ride into town along a broad, dusty main street. A white clapboard church and tidy shops and homes mark the town's edge, and a sign in front of the chapel reads "Valley Hope Place of Prayer." Passersby eye you curiously, with what might be a little dislike. A few kids playing in front of a small schoolhouse stop their fun and silently watch you pass. A middle-aged woman herds them inside and closes the schoolhouse door with a backward glance at you.

Valley Hope looks like a nice place. Shame the folks here don't seem to cotton to strangers.

If the shadowrunners accompany the landsteamer into town, read the following:

Just outside of town, the road forks. The steamer turns off the main road, bearing along a gentle curve. Following it, you pass outbuildings and warehouses. As the steamer crawls along the road, a few folks gather and yell greetings. The conductor bellows news of the robbery, and a youngster runs to fetch the town doctor. Someone else shouts something about getting the sheriff. As the story of the fight with the outlaws begins to spread, a few townsfolk throw admiring glances your way.

After the shadowrunners arrive in town, read the following:

Down the street, a bay window erupts in a welter of glass. A towering figure charges into the street, holding a screaming man above its head. It hurls the man away. His screams choke off abruptly as he hits the front of a building with a sickening, wet crunch.

Passersby scurry for cover. A horse hitched in front of the town hall rears, screaming in terror. The monstrous giant bellows and stabs clawed hands in the direction of the horse. You feel a blast of heat, and the poor animal collapses, reduced to a charred mass of meat.

You can see the towering thing clearly now, and you probably wish you couldn't. It stands about three meters tall, covered in a cracked, mottled gray hide shot through with twisting veins of white. In the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, the veins seem to glow greenish-white. The monster has only one good eye; the other is a puffy wound, weeping pus down the thing's pocked cheek. Its long arms end in wicked-looking claws. Scraps of rotted cloth flutter across its body here and there.

As you goggle at the monster, its good eye rolls toward you. It snarls and raises its arms. The glowing veins flash with brighter fire as tendrils of energy crackle around its talons.

HOOKS

The gamemaster should keep the weirdness going and play up the surrealism of the events. Hopefully, the runners will begin to play along.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This encounter launches the runners into two potential fights, either of which can make them look like heroes or cowards.

THE TRAIN RAID

Landsteamers, the "iron horses" of this Place, use alchemical engines that burn a rare mineral called phlogiston for power. Their

tires are made of a tough, natural resin and can negotiate any reasonably smooth road, even if it is unpaved. Needless to say, wherever there are trains, there are train robbers, and this world is no exception.

Lucky for us, Butch Cassidy never had an earth elemental in the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang. These outlaws, however, do have the assistance of such a spirit, and the engineer does not want to pit his machine against its powers.

This encounter gives the runners an opportunity to get familiar with their weapons and equipment in fighting the outlaws and to figure out their magic in dispatching the elemental. In addition, if the runners take action to save the train, they can be sure of a hospitable welcome in town.

If the shadowrunners do not intervene, the steamer brakes to a halt as the earth elemental rips up the road in front of it. The bandits overtake the halted train, relieve its passengers of their valuables, and loot the freight car. Faced with magical as well as physical force, the passengers surrender. The outlaws then ride off with their loot (and out of this story). In the wee hours of the morning, the steamer pulls into town with its tale of woe.

If the player characters attack the elemental, they distract it from stopping the landsteamer. It pursues its new attackers, allowing the steamer to barrel onward. The outlaws continue to pursue the steamer, leaving the elemental to whup the interfering runners. If the player characters attack the outlaws, the outlaws split up; half of them turn off the road to engage the runners, and the other half pursue the steamer. If the player characters let the robbers stop the steamer and then attack, the passengers dive for cover and take no part in the ensuing fight.

The road on which the steamer travels is about 10 meters wide and runs straight for about 100 meters in front and in back of the steamer. The ground slopes up sharply along the road, making it almost a gully at this point; unless the rider spends a full Combat Turn negotiating the slope, he or she must make a successful Riding (5) Test to safely climb or descend on horseback. The interior of each car looks like a 19th-century train car: a box about four meters wide and fifteen meters long, with rows of thinly padded wooden benches on either side of a narrow, central aisle and a small window by each bench.

The Outlaws

The outlaw gang numbers two cowpokes per shadowrunner plus the gang's leader, a troll cowpunk (for game statistics on cowpokes and cowpunks, see **Cast of Shadows**, p. 79). Just to make things interesting, use the same mix of races for the cowpokes as the runners chose for themselves. For example, if the player characters comprise a troll, an ork, and two humans, then the outlaws should consist of two troll cowpokes, two ork cowpokes, and four human cowpokes.

If half the outlaws are knocked out of the fight, the rest run for the hills, splitting up in several directions to evade pursuit. Captured outlaws can offer no useful information. They live a wide-ranging life, hitting small towns and isolated landsteamers with the assistance of the elemental. The runners may take the weapons and the 2D6 dollars carried by each dead or captured outlaw as spoils of battle.

The earth elemental is a Force 6 elemental—in manifest form, as all spirits on this metaplane must be in order to function. It has the ratings and powers of a typical earth elemental as described on pp. 142 and 216, **SRII**. Remember that argent rounds allow player characters to use firearms against elementals.

The easily confused elemental can only concentrate on one opponent at a time. If attacked from different directions, it goes after the closest attacker, ignoring other distractions unless someone gets in its way as it moves toward its target. Once it disposes of one target, it chooses another. Against a mounted opponent it prefers to use its engulf power, trapping the horse so that the elemental can close with the rider in physical combat. The elemental fights until destroyed.

After the Fight

Assuming the shadowrunners vanquish the bandits, the steamer's passengers regard them as heroes. Some folks will pass the hat, collecting 62 dollars as a reward for the characters. The torn-up road where the elemental manifested requires 4 hours labor to repair well enough to let the steamer by, though any player character who can wield earth magic can manifest earth to patch the road and allow the steamer to travel onward immediately. The conductor will urge the shadowrunners to ride alongside the steamer the rest of the way into town, to both discourage the outlaws from striking again and so that he can tell folks about the runners' brave actions when they get to Valley Hope.

WELCOME TO VALLEY HOPE

One hundred and eighty people live in the town of Valley Hope, some in homes along the main road. The road through the valley splits just before entering town. The southern leg becomes Main Street; the northern leg, along which the landsteamers pass through town, is called Train Street. The townspeople are all extras, as described in **Cast of Shadows**, p. 80.

Buildings marked with an R on the map are private residences, sometimes occupied by one family and sometimes renting rooms. Buildings marked with an S are stables. Every building has an outhouse located somewhere in the back.

Valley Hope Map Key

Church (1): Across Main Street, atop a small hill, stands the church and the town cemetery. The church sports a fine new steeple complete with a built-in clock brought all the way from the East.

Parsonage and Schoolhouse (2): Parson Emmerick and his wife live in the parsonage, and Mrs. Emmerick is the schoolteacher. Both Emmericks are orks. The parson is also a magician able to use fire and water, but he can only banish spirits. When required, he acts as the town exorcist.

Sheriff's Office and Jail (3): 'Nuff said.

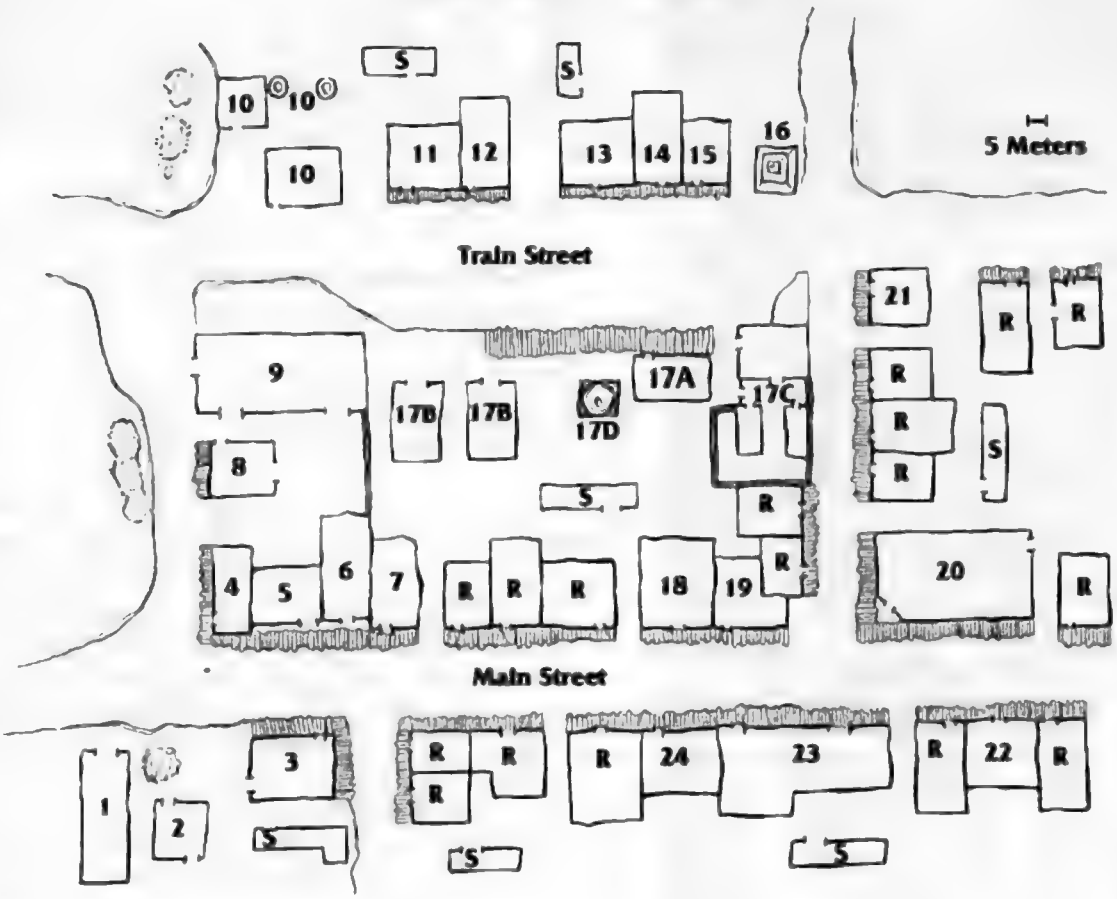
***Clarion* Offices (4):** The *Valley Hope Clarion* is the local newspaper and a crucial source of local history (see **Legwork**, p. 70). An elf named Kendall Silver is the editor.

Festus Barber Shop (5): A shave costs 10 cents, a haircut 15 cents, a bath 50 cents.

Mrs. Jenning's Boarding House (6): No vacancies at present.

Fergus Fine Yard Goods (7): Fabric and tailoring services are available here. Repairs cost 10 cents for minor darning or patching, $1.00 for major repairs.

VALLEY HOPE



Max Hammel's Smithy and Livery Stable (8–9): It costs 25 cents a night to board a horse, 50 cents for thunderfeet.

Union Feed Store and Seed Stock (10): Feed and seed are available here.

Old No. 93 Saloon (11): The Old No. 93 charges the same prices as the Songbird Saloon, but does not rent rooms and serves no meals.

Hasher's Carpentry and Lumberyard (12): The lumberyard sells the main materials for construction in this town.

Flattop Mining Co. Business Office (13): A sign posted on the door directs all inquiries about employment or mine business to Mr. Trey at the Flattop Mine.

Offices of Simon Renfrew, Attorney (14): Renfrew can answer questions about business matters in the valley and can also tell the shadowrunners the history of the town.

Western Spherics Business Office (15): At a cost of 5 cents a word, locals can send messages by crystal ball.

Western Spherics Crystallomant's Tower (16): This tower is a magical construct used to power the crystal ball. Its operator works in a ritual chamber atop the tower.

Union Continental Landsteamer Station (17–17d): All landsteamers pull into this station. It consists of a ticket office and waiting room **(17a)**, luggage and freight warehouses **(17b)**, and a phlogiston stockpile **(17c)** guarded by two cowpokes at all times. Near the station is a tall water tower **(17d)**.

Doc Wunderlich's Office (18): Doc Wunderlich is the town's physician. Medical facilities are crude by the standards of 2055. Treatment in Doc's infirmary is nothing special; bonuses for hospital care do not apply. Doc Wunderlich also serves as a source for the town's history.

Valley Hope Bank (19): A troll cowpunk guards the bank during business hours, 10–4 Monday through Saturday.

Songbird Saloon (20): Jed Porkins owns this place, which is described in **Down in the Valley**, p. 68.

Valley Hope Land Office (21): Land claims are made, settled, and recorded in this small building.

Valley Hope Farmers' Cooperative (22): The Coop sells fresh produce (2 cents/lb) and meat (8 cents/lb).

Wardell's Emporium (23): Winch Wardell is the proprietor of this general store.

Mrs. Venturi's Apothecary (24): First aid supplies such as bandages, herbal poultices, and antiseptic are available at 50 cents per unit.

Regardless of whether or not the runners come into town with the landsteamer (as described in **Tell It to Them Straight**), the runners' arrival coincides with the attack of the mine creature. The villainous Mr. Trey created this critter from the corpse of a miner out at the Flattop Phlogiston Mine.

If the creature erupts from a building on Main Street, the runners will be in front of the church, and the monster con-

fronts them in front of Fergus Fine Yard Goods. If the characters confront the monster on Train Street, they stand in front of the Old No. 93 Saloon, and the monster emerges from the Flattop Mining Co. Business Office. Needless to say, the emergence of the creature trashes the office. The landsteamer has just pulled into the siding in front of the station.

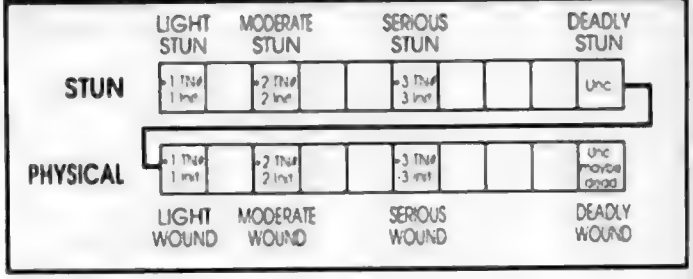
The monster attacks the shadowrunners as soon as it sees them and fights until dead. If rendered unconscious, its bond to Trey is broken; without his power to sustain it, it disintegrates. Ideally, the shadowrunners should take the monster down without serious trouble. If they seem to be losing, Sheriff Bergamot joins the fight. He fires argent bullets and dispatches the creature with a few well-placed shots from his heavy Winchester.

Mine Monster

B	Q	S	C	I	W	M	R	Armor
8	6	10	0	2	3	6	4	4/2

Initiative: 4 + 2D6

CONDITION MONITOR



Threat/Professional Rating: 3/6
Skills: Sorcery 6, Unarmed Combat 8 (Reach +1, 10M damage from talons)
Notes: The mine monster can cast a Force 6 fire attack spell. The creature's armor is a magical effect, and its Ballistic Rating does not reduce damage from argent rounds.

If the player characters defeat the monster with or without help from the sheriff, they receive a heroes' welcome from the town. An admiring crowd invites them to the Songbird Saloon for a free round of drinks, and the Songbird's owner, Jed Porkins, offers them free rooms for the night. The team receives even more it they already earned acclaim by foiling the landsteamer robbery. For a description of the Songbird Saloon and its stuff and regular fixtures, see **Settling In**, p. 68 of **Down in the Valley**, the next chapter.

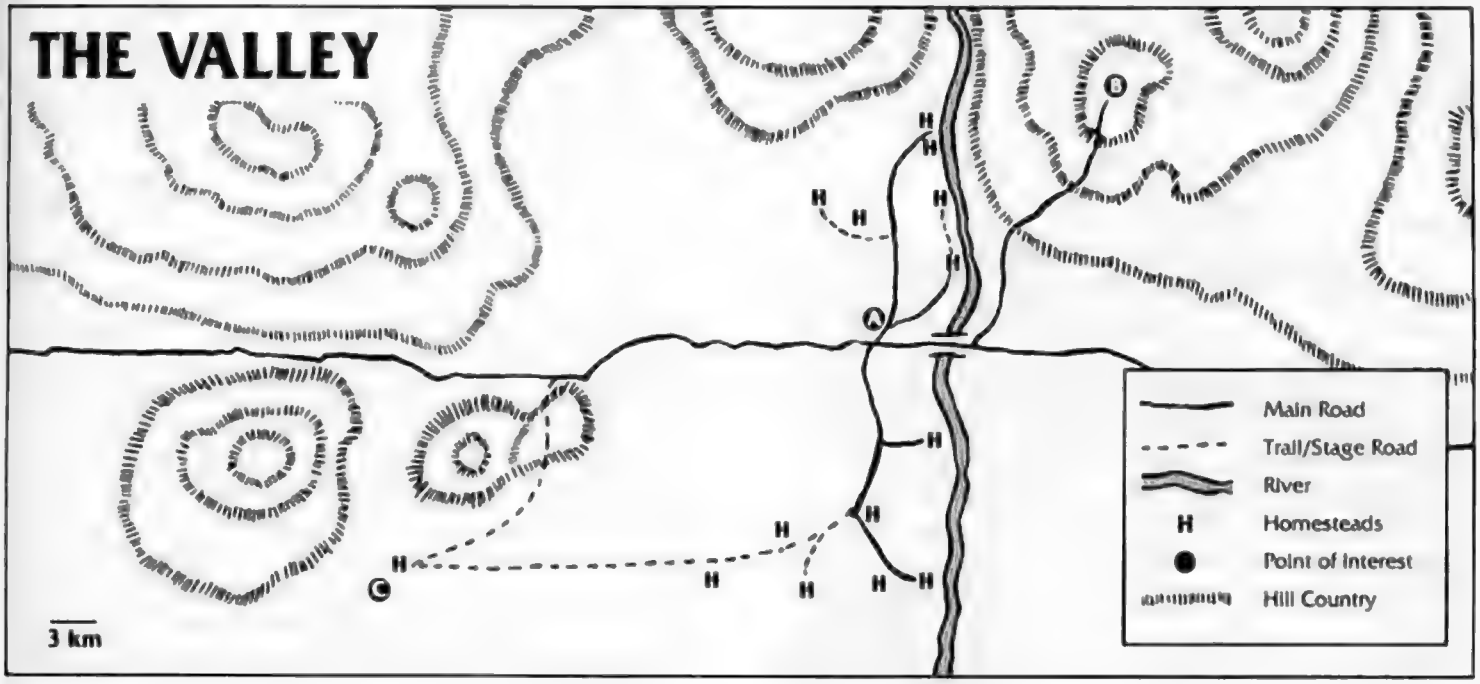
If the runners turned tail and ran, or otherwise did nothing to earn a heroes' welcome ... well, none of the other folks did much about the creature either, so nobody will be too hard on them for being yellow. But nobody offers the runners any free drinks or rooms, either.

DEBUGGING

In the initial battle with the outlaws, the only real trouble occurs if the outlaws start kicking the shadowrunners' butts. In this case, the gamemaster can have several passengers take heart and start firing on the bandits. If the runners have trouble dealing with the earth elemental, have a wounded passenger toss a heavy rifle loaded with argents to the nearest player character. The silver bullets should dispatch the beastie. As a last resort, a previously unconscious passenger can wake up and turn out to be capable of banishing earth elementals.

Apart from getting torn up by the mine monster, which the gamemaster can avoid by using Sheriff Bergamot as a rescuer, the only other obvious problem occurs if the runners decide they don't like this Place and simply ride out of town. Not to worry. Let them ride wherever they like; when they reach the end of the valley, they will re-enter it from the opposite side. Whether they like it or not they are trapped in the valley until the adventure's climax, win or lose. If the shadowrunners try to leave the area in any way, they simply waste time riding through this loop and end up where they started. Feel free to put the adventure timetable "on hold" if the players try to escape, and pick up the schedule when they get back from their excursions. Go to **Down in the Valley**, the next chapter.

DOWN IN THE VALLEY



TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

When the runners settle into the Songbird Saloon, read the following:

The only place in town with rooms to rent is the Songbird Saloon. It's also the closest place where a feller can get a drop to cut the dust, so it isn't long before you walk through the saloon's swinging doors.

The harpsichord in the corner doesn't sound like the usual barroom piano, and the feller playing it wears a dirty powdered wig and a soiled satin suit. Half a dozen barmaids and barboys in cheap, rumpled finery and sweat-streaked makeup stroll through the room with trays of drinks and food, or sit at the tables with the clientele, laughing and keeping the orders coming. Most of the patrons are drinking beer or wine drawn from huge hogsheads behind the bar, hefting their drinks in heavy pewter goblets. A popular alternative seems to be an herbed cordial served in a ceramic mug and set on fire before drinking.

A pretty woman with pale skin and black hair comes up to you carrying a tray. She smiles and gestures as if to say, what'll you have? When you ask her name, her smile turns sad for a moment. She touches her slim throat and shakes her head. Someone at a nearby table mutters, "Celia can't talk none. Dem shame, she used'ta sing like a bird."

BEHIND THE SCENES

This section describes Valley Hope and the surrounding territory, places and people of interest, and the information the player characters can learn. The gamemaster should give the players a copy of the valley map below and the town map (see **Valley Hope**, p. 65), but only legwork or active investigation allows them to determine the significance of the locations marked on either map.

ABOUT THE VALLEY

In addition to the 180 people living in the town of Valley Hope, another hundred or so folks live in the valley itself. The following map and key show sites of interest to the player characters.

Valley Hope (A)

See the town map and accompanying description for details (**Valley Hope**, pp. 63–66).

Flattop Phlogiston Mine (B)

If the shadowrunners explore this area, they will find only the ruins of the miners' barracks and the empty tunnels and shafts of the abandoned mine. No sign of human habitation exists in the area, even though Mr. Trey claims to live on the site.

Blood Eagle Ranch (C)

Blood Eagle Ranch is the stronghold of Sy Vants, the main villain of this piece. In the area marked "C" on the map stands a comfortable two-story ranch house, a large bunkhouse for the Blood Eagle gang, and assorted cattle pens, stables, and outbuildings.

Attacking the ranch is a risky proposition. The ranch house and its environs are almost always guarded by a force containing two cowpokes per shadowrunner, led by two human cowpunks. This force is busy elsewhere only twice during this adventure: during the events described under **Hoorawl** in the **Day One** chapter (p. 72) and **No Escape** in the **Day Two** chapter (p. 74). During those events, only four cowpokes and a human cowpunk protect Blood Eagle Ranch.

Homesteads (H)

Areas marked with an H on the valley map are homesteads worked by families seeking a new life on the frontier. All of these are small farms, with at most a dozen head of cattle and a few planted acres. The houses all have two or three rooms, and a small barn and some sheds shelter nearby. If the shadowrunners approach a homestead politely and make no threatening moves, they receive simple hospitality from the residents: water (or perhaps some more vigorous drink), a bite to eat, directions to their destination, and so on. They can also elicit information by chatting with homesteaders, as described in the **Legwork** section of this adventure, page 69.

SETTLING IN

The player characters should settle in at the Songbird Saloon, which is intended as a focal point of action in the adventure as well as an ad hoc base of operations for the shadowrunners. If a crowd of admirers escorts them in after their heroic actions in the adventure to date, so much the better. Jed Porkins, an ork and the owner of the Songbird, makes them welcome with free rooms and a round of drinks on the house.

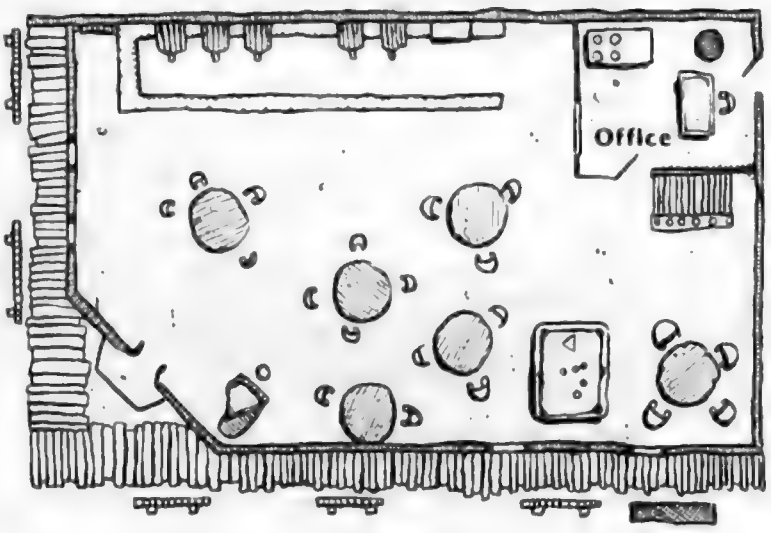
The wine is decent but the flaming cordial known as Dragon's Breath is terrific. Every shot of Dragon's Breath does 4L Stun damage at +1 to the Power for every previous round drunk in the past few hours. For example, a third drink of the stuff does 6L damage. To resist this damage, drinkers must roll Body dice. The more Stun damage a character accumulates from drinking the stuff, the drunker he or she becomes. (Oh, and the hangover is spectacular.) Prices for drinks, meals, rooms, and entertainment at the Songbird appear on the table above.

Soon after the player characters arrive at the Songbird, the gamemaster should make a point of introducing Celia to them. In some ways, she typifies what will happen to the town if Trey,

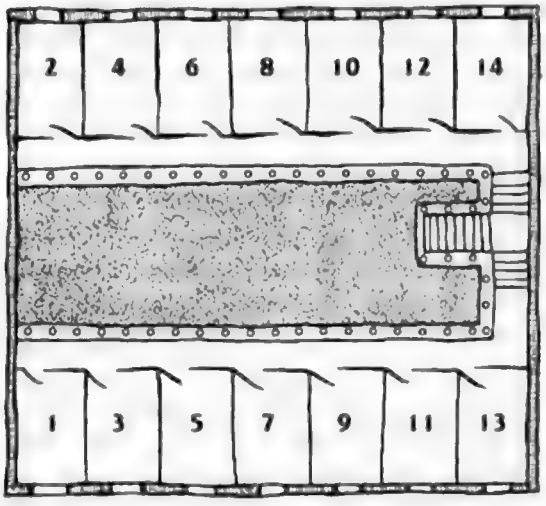
SONGBIRD SALOON PRICE LIST

Item	Cost
Beer	$.10
Wine	$.25
Dragon's Breath	$.50
Meal	$.50
Room	$.75
Private Room	$1.00
Entertainment	$2.00
Lengthy Entertainment	$10.00

SONGBIRD SALOON



1st Floor



2nd Floor

1 Meter

the evil Sy Vants, and his sidekick Dred Francis take over. Celia lives in the upstairs room marked 2 (see Second Floor Map, below). Porkins lives in a house next door to the saloon. Rooms 4, 6, 8 and 10 are home to the saloon's other two employees, who augment their incomes by conducting entertainment in their quarters. The other rooms are for rent; the shadowrunners will most likely stay in them during this adventure.

LEGWORK

In plenty of places in Valley Hope, casual conversation or diligent research can give the characters important information about the town, its people, and its history. Player characters can learn several different tidbits by chatting with folks around town or at the homesteads; they can also learn about Celia specifically by sounding out locals at the Songbird, or about Valley Hope's history by talking to Kendall Silver, Doc Wunderlich, or Simon Renfrew. As with standard legwork, the player must make a Success Test using an appropriate Etiquette Skill against a given target number. The amount of information available depends on the number of successes achieved. Characters who achieve more than 1 success gain all the information available at all previous levels of success.

AROUND TOWN

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)
Any townsfolk, merchants, barber, and so on.

Successes	Result
1	"It's been gettin' bad. That critter you fellers ran into is just the latest. Never used'ta have much trouble with angry spirits, but lately Parson's been run ragged putting down spooks. Tetchy fire critter tried to burn down the livery last week. Well, I hope to tell ya, it was a near thing."
2	"I hear tell Mr. Trey from the mine company is lookin' t'open up old Flattop agin. It'd be a good thing, I guess, bring in more money fer the town, but there wuz talk that the tailin's from the mine was pizenin' the water hereabouts. That's one reason they shut the place down, 'bout the time the sheriff and the Vigilance Committee cleaned out the worst of the hooligans that were runnin' the valley. Must be five, six years ago now."
3	"Well, you didn't hear it from me—live and let live, I always say—but a feller from the Blood Eagle spread was talkin' big at the Old No. 93 last night, and he allowed as how anyone who wanted to get along in this town had best walk soft around Sy Vants from now on, cuz things wuz gonna be different soon."

HOMESTEADS

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)
Any homesteader.

Successes	Result
1	"The Blood Eagles have been pushin' us to sell out to Sy Vants. Well, I told him I didn't come here just to move on agin, but last month I found my prize milch cow dead in her stall. Doc says it looked like locoweed pizenin', but I been all over my meadow and ain't found a sniff of locoweed. Now, I dunno, I got the family to look out fer. Mebbe I oughtta think about it."
2	"Mr. Trey from the mine, he's been telling us there'll be good money made when the mine opens up agin next year. Seems like I could do right well to sell the spread and move on over to Flattop."

CELIA

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 3)

Anyone at the Songbird after **Hoorawl** (**Day One**, p. 72) is over.

Successes	Result
1	"Long 'bout six years back, Celia used'ta sing here at the Songbird. She gave the place a fair claim to its name, too. Well, Sy Vants took a real shine to Celia, but he's awful rough on women he takes a likin' to."
2	"Seems like one night, he tried to ... well ... to force her, and when she fought him he beat her plumb near to death. Ever since then, poor little gal can't sing a note; hell, she can't even talk no more. Vants just got more crazy, like he'd put his brand on her. Him or one of his boys killed one feller who was gettin' kinda sweet on Celia. Most every night he was in the Songbird, sometimes just watchin' her, other times makin' her sit with him while he talked at her. "After the sheriff and the vigilantes cleaned out the town, Vants spent awhile in territorial court. He musta bought his way off, cuz one night he walked in big as life and twice as ugly, and started in on Celia again. Well sir, Sheriff Bergamot come in, and when Vants drew on him, sheriff put a bullet in his arm, kicked him into the street, and horsewhipped him clear out of town."
3	"That happened mebbe four years back. Since then, Vants seemed to settle down some. Looks like he was just a-bidin' his time, though. Things could get ugly round here."

TOWN HISTORY

This information is available from Kendall Silver, editor of the *Valley Hope Clarion*; Doc Wunderlich; or the town's attorney, Simon Renfrew. All three community leaders worked with Bergamot to break Vants' power in the valley. The shadowrunners need not make any Success Tests to get this information; they need only ask any of the above-mentioned characters about the history of Valley Hope.

"Six years ago, this valley was caught between two ruinous elements. Sy Vants, whose daddy had been one of the first settlers out here, treated the whole valley like a feudal preserve. When the territorial government opened the area to homesteading, Vants went nearly insane at the thought of what he called "settler trash" fencing his range.

"On the other side of the river, we had the Flattop Phlogiston Mine. The mine managers treated Valley Hope like any other boom town—a cheap place to provide rooms, bars, and gambling to separate the miners from their pay packets.

And the money coming through the town attracted toughs from all over. To make matters worse, the tailings from the mine were poisoning the river and even getting into the well water. The managers kept saying the matter was under study, but nothing ever got done.

"Arlen Bergamot started out as a saddle tramp with a gun like lightning. He came into town to claim a small bequest left him by a brother of his who'd gotten killed one night, shortly after he stood up at a town meeting and suggested that the town get an injunction to close down the mine. Well, Bergamot stayed long enough to hunt down the men who'd killed his brother, and got enough evidence to bring murder charges against the mine's manager to boot. With that as a lever, we persuaded the company to close down Flattop.

"Bergamot stayed on in Valley Hope—said it had the kind of peace he'd been looking for. I was one of a group of citizens who approached him and asked him to lead a Vigilance Committee to put down Sy Vants and his wild dogs. He agreed, and put steel into folks' spines. With Bergamot leading us, we closed down the worst saloons and cleaned out the brothels, and put the Blood Eagle gang on notice that their days of ruling with the gun were over. Everything came to a head one day; when the shooting stopped, Bergamot had dropped Vants' top gun—a fellow named Dred Francis—and had both Francis and Vants in custody.

"Sy's money and connections kept him out of prison, though Francis drew a sentence. Most of the other gunslingers got killed or ran off, and for the last few years it's been pretty peaceful around here.

"Now, I don't know ... I don't like the look of things at all. Vants has been building up the Blood Eagle spread and has a small army out there. And this gent from the mining company, Mr. Trey, is trying his damndest to open the mine again. Something's gone out of the people here—myself included. Seems like all our efforts may just go for nothing."

DAY ONE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following as part of the events described under *Hoorawl*, p. 72:

You sit in the saloon comparing notes from your separate conversations and easing your thirst. Outside, the afternoon sun bakes the dusty street. The bewigged harpsichord-player's music makes you think of birds by the side of a brook. Maybe that's why you don't hear the approaching hooves until the first shot rings out.

Shrill yells, galloping hooves, and gunfire suddenly fill the street. An elderly man by the door glances out, then ducks back. " 'Pears the Blood Eagle boys are hoorawin' the town," he says, his voice flat. As if punctuating his remark, a well-dressed townsman dives through the saloon doors, trips, and sprawls face-first in the damp sawdust on the floor.

As the chaos outside continues to mount, the saloon doors swing open and two men swagger into the Songbird. One is human, well-dressed in a stylish suit of dark serge and a battered Stetson. The other is an elf in fancy duds, with a glittering steel cyberarm attached to one shoulder. The spinet's music stops abruptly. Without more than a token glance at you or the other customers, these two toughs walk to the big table by the bar.

Once seated, the human looks around, grinning. "This here's a saloon, ain't it? Whaddya gotta do t'get a drink in here? People come here f'ra good time, don't they? So why aintcha havin' a good time?"

The owner comes to the table, nervous and sweating. He addresses the human. "What can I get you fellas, Sy?"

Sy glances at him sourly. "Not you, Porky. You know who I want."

"Aw, now, Mr. Vants, after last time, sheriff told ya ... "

Vants rises partway out of his chair. "Sheriff ain't here, Porky, is he now?"

The sweating saloonkeeper scuttles away, stammering. "OK, OK. I'll send her out."

Vants settles back in his seat, grinning. "How 'bout a little music?" he yells. In the moment of quiet that follows, you hear the sound of a slap from the kitchen. The spinet player begins to pick out a tremulous tune. After a moment, Celia comes out, rubbing one reddened cheek. The two cowboys' grins grow wider as she walks slowly and fearfully toward the table.

Keep reading the scene until (hopefully) the player characters present intervene. (If they don't, they don't.)

With exaggerated courtesy, Vants rises and pulls out a chair. "Well, Miss Celia. Been a long time. You're just as purty as you were back then, too. Quieter, maybe." Vants' sideboy snickers.

Celia doesn't move. Vants grabs her arm and slams her into the seat. The elf stands up and moves behind her chair. She stares dully at the table. Vants draws his chair up to face her and begins talking in a low voice. You can't hear what he's saying, but it makes Celia turn her head away with a grimace of disgust. Vants grabs her chin with casual strength and forces her to look at him as he keeps talking. This offhand brutality goes on for a minute or two, until Celia suddenly snaps. Mouth open in a silent scream, she leaps at Vants with her hands stretched into claws. Vants seems to shrug, and Celia is hurled to the floor with stunning force. The only sound in the room is her tortured breathing.

The elf with the arm extends one fancy tooled-leather boot and pins Celia's wrist to the floor with it. Vants, with something like madness glittering in his eyes, stands over her. "Just a little taste, Miss Celia. After tomorrow you'll sing a new song, little bird. You surely will." He turns and walks out of the bar, the elf backing out behind him, keeping alert eyes on the hangdog customers. The cowboys saddle up and lead the pack of whooping, shooting Blood Eagle boys out of town.

Celia gets painfully to her feet. None of the townspeople meet her eyes. You do, and in them you see the contempt so richly deserved by people who stand by and let these things happen. Holding her head high, Celia walks up the stairs to her room.

Read the following as part of the events under *Bad News*, p. 72:

The quiet evening is broken in stages, as the startling piece of news spreads from one person to the next like raindrops spattering the surface of a pond. Ripples trigger more ripples, until the evening's stillness is turned into chaos. A townsman runs up to you and blurts out, "Have you heard? Dred Francis is coming back to town. He'll be here tomorrow, on the noon steamer. It's over. All over."

Read the following as part of the events under *Fire in the Night*, p. 73:

Screams and the clanging of a bell shatter the silence of the night. Confused voices shout the dreadful word: "Fire!" As you tumble out into the street, the lurid glow of a burning building lights the sky and a tickle of smoke catches in your throat. A man running past with a duster drawn over his nightgown yells, "The land office! The land office is burning!"

BEHIND THE SCENES

After a restful night in a couple of rooms above the Songbird Saloon, the shadowrunners can continue to get acquainted with their surroundings. They will be free to do legwork, explore the valley, and so on. At some point during this day, all four of the events described in the following pages take place. Save for the obvious fact that **Fire in the Night** occurs late in day one, the events take place in no particular order.

MEETING THE SHERIFF

If the player characters look for Sheriff Bergamot around town, no one claims to have seen him since yesterday's fracas with the mine monster. If the runners check the sheriff's office, they find it locked up tight. If they break in, they discover the sheriff fairly easily by following the smell of raw whiskey. Bergamot is passed out in one of his own cells, sleeping off a monumental drunk. Player characters may use First Aid, Medicine, or Etiquette Skill to sober him up; the process takes a base time of 8 hours and all Success Tests must be made against Target Number 5. The character trying to sober up Bergamot must stay with him constantly, dosing him with food and coffee, working him over with cold water, and so on. At the end of the process (or 12 hours, if the test fails) the sheriff is both sober and able to interact with other characters. Until then, he is either unconscious or incoherent.

If no one intervenes, Bergamot remains out of action until day two. If the player characters sober him up earlier, they can try to give him a backbone transplant as described in **Call to Duty (Day Two**, p. 75).

HOORAW!

The gamemaster should begin this event by reading the players the appropriate **Tell It to Them Straight** text (p. 71). The well-dressed tough is Sy Vants, owner of the Blood Eagle Ranch. As the player characters may guess from his behavior toward Celia, he is also this Place's avatar of the dark warrior. The cybered elf is one of his cowpunk gunslingers. The rest of Vants' boys thunder up and down Main Street throughout the saloon scene, chasing passersby, shooting at signs and windows, and otherwise having a good, old-fashioned hooraw.

Trey has assured Vants that Sheriff Bergamot is currently out of commission and will be permanently removed the next day when Dred Francis arrives. Vants is getting a head start on enjoying the new regime.

The players should discover the ugly history between Vants and Celia through legwork. During the saloon scene, all onlookers can see that Vants appears to feel a sadistic lust for Celia that revolts and terrifies her. Hopefully, the scene will not proceed as written. The gamemaster should read it with an occasional pause to let the player characters intervene. If they do, Vants gestures to the elf to take care of them while he keeps his attention on Celia.

The elf then plants himself between Vants and the player characters, saying, "You fellows must be strangers. It isn't wise to interfere with Mr. Vants. Why not get wise and sit down?" The curled fingers of his cyberhand float over the butt of his six-gun as he speaks. "None of your nevermind anyway, is it? Just two old friends taking care of unfinished business."

At that point, it's the shadowrunners' play. If anyone makes a move for a gun or starts to cast a spell they touch off a shoot-out with the elf. Resolve combat, keeping in mind that the elf fights to the death. If the player characters do not act, the scene continues as before, but the elf stays where he is—ready to kill—until he and his boss leave.

If the runners make a move, Vants leaps up at the first shot, Celia held in a cruel grip in front of him as a shield. He yells at the shadowrunners, "Yer all dead men. Y'hear me?! Dead men!" He backs toward the door, pushing Celia back into the room as soon as he ducks outside. Vants immediately leads his gang out of town. He is at heart a coward, but he is also confused—he was not supposed to face any resistance. The town was supposed to have been cowed. If Vants starts trouble in Valley Hope before Dred Francis arrives, he could get in trouble with Mr. Trey—and he is very, very frightened of Trey.

If the shadowrunners attempt to pursue Vants, they come under fire from a dozen Blood Eagle boys, which should drive them back into the saloon.

Celia gently refuses attempts to help her up, preferring to get up under her own power. Once on her feet, she smiles, touches one of the runners gently on the cheek, then turns and goes up to her room. If anyone goes to check on her condition, she does not open the door, but simply slips a note under the door that reads, "Please go away. I am fine." She stays in her room until evening.

BAD NEWS

If the player characters have not learned Dred Francis' identity or why his arrival in town should cause such a stir, the man who told them of Francis' arrival will suggest they talk to the editor of the *Clarion*, or maybe to Doc Wunderlich. Either of these NPCs can reveal the town history information given in **Legwork**, p. 70 of **Down in the Valley**. If the runners listen in on the discussions taking place on every street and in the saloon, they will learn that Sheriff Bergamot apparently knew about Francis' pending arrival yesterday, shortly after the shadowrunners arrived in town. He tried to enlist the aid of the town leaders—the doctor, lawyer, and newspaper editor—to form a force to oppose Francis, Vants, and their gunslingers, but they refused.

If the shadowrunners try to mobilize the townsfolk to arm themselves and meet Francis with guns in their hands, a tall, handsome man (Mr. Trey) steps up and argues against getting involved in a personal feud between the sheriff and Francis. Instead, he suggests that Bergamot just leave town, because then Francis would have no reason to stay. Furthermore, he says, in the event of trouble, his own Flattop Mining Company is prepared to bring in lawmen to keep the peace as part of their program to rejuvenate the old mine outside town and bring new prosperity to Valley Hope.

The speaker delivers this argument cogently and forcefully, and people quickly agree with him. "Mr. Trey's right," is the general opinion. The street crowd quickly breaks up as people head for their homes. Some shutter their windows and hope for the best. Others, their hearts gripped by terror, pack their belongings and prepare to flee.

FIRE IN THE NIGHT

Late that night, a fire elemental rampages through the land office (21 on the town map). As people try to form a bucket brigade from the water tower near the landsteamer station (17d), the spirit hurls fiery bolts at them, roaring with laughter as they scatter.

Unless the shadowrunners destroy the elemental by force or with magic, it reduces the land office to ashes in minutes. After starting a few more minor blazes on the roofs of neighboring residential buildings, it leaps into the sky and flashes off toward the west.

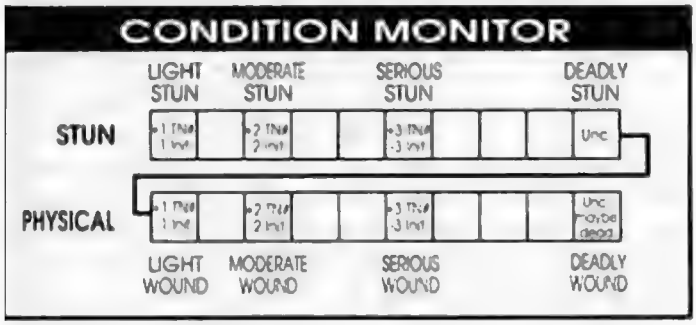
A water magician can extinguish the blaze handily once the runners have disposed of the spirit. Otherwise, the land office burns to the ground.

Fire Elemental

Trey has sent this Force 8 fire elemental to further tear apart morale and social structure in the town. If the player characters engage it in combat, it fights until destroyed.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
9	10 x 3	6	8	8	8	(8) A	9

Initiative: 19 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 8/4
Attacks: Ranged Combat (Skill = 9), Range = 16 meters, Damage = 8M
Powers: Engulf, Flame Aura, Flame Projection, Guard, Manifestation, Movement
Weakness: Vulnerability (Water)
Notes: The laws of this Place require the elemental to be in its manifest form at all times.



DEBUGGING

Various debugging strategies for each event of **Day One** appear below. Once the various events of the first day have played out and the runners have had time to do legwork (see p. 69), move on to **Day Two**, the next chapter.

HOORAW!

If Vants' elf sidekick appears to be trashing the player characters, Vants calls off the gunslinger. Much as he might like to start a full-scale shoot-out, he dares not do so yet because he might anger Mr. Trey.

If the player characters somehow get the drop on Vants even though he has Celia as a hostage, the cowpokes and cowpunks outside burst into the saloon to rescue him. If the shadowrunners don't appear to mind being outgunned, have a townsman whimper, "Fer the luvva heaven, stranger, they'll kill us all if ya don't turn him loose!"

If the shadowrunners decide to start a full-scale war with the Blood Eagles, Vants gallops out of town while his boys fight it out with the player characters. Assuming the good guys win, they'll have that many fewer gunnies to shoot tomorrow.

BAD NEWS

If a player character tries to pick a fight with Trey, Trey gently opens his coat to show he is unarmed and refuses to take offense at anything the runner says. If the runner presses the fight anyway, Trey retreats and attempts to use his icy hand power to make the player character back off. Once out of sight, Trey teleports back to the mine. If the runners pursue Trey, each of them must make a successful Perception (8) Test to see him disappear. If a character achieves more than one success, he or she briefly sees Trey's human outline waver and assume the shape of something ... horrible before vanishing from sight.

DAY TWO

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following as part of the events of *No Escape*, below:

As dawn breaks over the valley, you hear a racket of horses, shouts, and the clatter of wheels and harnesses through your window. You look out on to Main Street and see a dozen wagons full of people, accompanied by ten or fifteen riders. Doors and windows pop open up and down the length of the street as the noise mounts; mothers yell for children, and men curse balky mules, horses, and thunderfeet.

As the people shout questions and answers back and forth, you realize that the ones in the street are townsfolk and settlers escaping before Dred Francis arrives. Fearing the return of the bad times when the gun ruled in Valley Hope, they are gathering their families and most possessions and leaving.

By an hour after sunrise, the little cavalcade driven by fear is winding its way westward out of town, leaving hope behind.

Read the following as part of the events of *Last Words*, p. 76 :

People are beginning to peer out of their windows. The hot midday sun beats down on a street that looks like a battlefield. Smoke from the fires that Vants and his men set tint the air gray.

Through the smoke, you see a tall figure appear as if from nowhere. "You have all been very brave," says Trey. "Honorable, courageous ... and very, very annoying. Unfortunately, you are also more competent than my late associates."

He walks toward you, paying no attention as you adjust your weapons to cover him. As he walks, the handsome Mr. Trey becomes something else. Something horrible. His legs fuse and stretch into a thick serpent's body. His torso bulges with grotesque muscles, and a second pair of arms rips free from his disintegrating jacket. His face shudders and shifts into an elongated nightmare dominated by three glaring eyes and a gaping maw lined with needle-like teeth. The horrible thing's voice hisses in your ears, cutting through you like a knife. "If you cannot afford me amusement, then you can die."

HOOKS

Fear and desperation rule the town. Play up the sense of impending doom; describe people weeping openly in the streets, a family tossing all its belongings onto a wagon until nothing more will fit and they must decide what to leave behind, a clock ticking ominously in the background, and so on. One way or another, a confrontation is coming and the player characters can feel it in the air.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Various events that occur on this day are described in the following passages. They should occur in the order given, though the gamemaster may make appropriate changes to best fit the circumstances. The runners may spend the early part of the day guarding the fleeing townsfolk **(No Escape)** or straightening out the sheriff **(Call to Duty)**, or may try to tackle both daunting tasks. If the runners manage to influence events so that Bergamot frees the town once again, Trey goes after the runners for spoiling his fun little scam.

NO ESCAPE

If the shadowrunners try to persuade the fleeing townsfolk to stay, they fail. These people are terrified, perhaps more than should be expected, though when asked why they are leaving so precipitately, they all say, "You weren't here last time. You can't understand what it was like." Several of the settlers got burned out yesterday; even as the player characters urge them to stay, reports begin to trickle into town that the Blood Eagle gang is torching the abandoned homesteads. Instead of firing up the victims with angry courage, this news plunges them deeper into despair and strengthens their resolve to leave.

These poor folks get into real trouble after they travel a few miles out of town. Just past the fork in the road leading to the Flattop mesa, a heavily armed band of cowpokes attacks the refugees. All those who resist, roughly 20 percent of the group, are killed. The cowpokes empty the settlers' wagons, leaving their possessions in pathetic heaps by the side of the road, then set the vehicles alight. The cowpokes also drive off the settlers' riding and draft animals into the surrounding area.

If any of the shadowrunners accompany the refugee wagon train or trail it by stealth, they will be present during the cowpokes' raid and so must decide whether to fight, surrender, or escape. Of the 14 raiders, 12 are cowpokes (8 humans, 2 elves, 2 trolls) and 2 are cowpunks (1 human and 1 troll). Four riders block the road ahead of the wagon train and order it to halt. When it does, or if the refugees try to break through the barricade, the rest of the force hits the wagons from both sides, five attackers on each side. Any horseman or wagon returning fire becomes the target of a barrage of gunfire. Unprepared for any serious resistance, the raiders withdraw if they take more than four casualties (members dead or incapacitated). They head off north at a full gallop, but if pursued they fight to the death rather than surrender.

Unless defeated in combat by the runners, the raiders order the beaten refugees back to town. The leader says, "You

had your chance to git and you didn't take it. Now you'll dance to our tune. They'll need workers up to the mine shortly, and you all look like just what the doctor ordered." The weary band will be a kilometer or two out of town when the landsteamer carrying Dred Francis chugs by.

CALL TO DUTY

Without active support to fight off his alcohol binge (and plenty of arguments) from the player characters, Sheriff Bergamot will be a hung over zombie when Dred Francis arrives on the noon steamer. The player characters should find it fairly easy to motivate the sheriff to fight; his conscience has already done most of the work, and his tough will has been unraveling the debilitating fear gnawing at him (an emotion implanted by Trey). This scene is primarily intended to give the players a chance to do some roleplaying.

Bergamot tells the runners his story in roughly the following words. "I stood up to these monsters once, long ago. But then I had the people standing behind me. We shared a dream, and we were willing to fight or even to die to keep it alive. Now I'm alone. Don't you understand that? Alone! The rest wash their hands of it and think they can survive. By the time they find out they're wrong, I'll be gone and what will I have accomplished?" The runners must then convince Bergamot to rise above his self-pity and fight.

Whether the player characters use Negotiation Skill or play out a soap-opera scene with Bergamot, the sheriff eventually pulls himself together. Depending on how early this scene takes place, if it takes place at all, the sheriff and any shadowrunners who accompany him can spend the rest of the time before the showdown trying to enlist the aid of the townsfolk. Unfortunately, Valley Hope's locals are a lost cause. Some are afraid. Others reluctantly admit that Trey has promised lucrative contracts with the mine to people with the sense to let the past take care of itself. Still others act openly hostile toward Bergamot, saying that "folks are tired of his rules and regulations—maybe this town needs to loosen up a little, let folks with grit make their own way." No matter what their motivation for refusing to help, all the townsfolk urge Bergamot to leave town before noon. His departure, they say, will solve their problem.

If the shadowrunners have not bothered to check up on Bergamot, they see him desperately trying to enlist the townsfolk's support throughout the morning of day two. If the runners do not actively support him, Bergamot will nerve himself to face Vants and Francis at high noon even though he is convinced he will die in the encounter.

As the last seconds before twelve o'clock tick by on the steeple clock in the church, the streets empty and Bergamot stands alone—unless the player characters stand with him.

HIGH NOON

By the time the showdown takes place, too many variables have entered the story to allow for any one setting.

As the clock strikes twelve, the eastbound landsteamer turns off the high road into Train Street and chugs through the deserted town. Alongside it rides Sy Vants. Depending on the number of shadowrunners active in the adventure, he may be accompanied by some of his men. If only a few shadowrunners remain able to fight, Vants and Francis will be accompanied by a single cowpunk (preferably the elf from **Hoorawl** if no one has killed him yet). If more than three runners are involved, give Vants an additional force of one cowpunk for every two player characters or one cowpoke per player character, mixed as the gamemaster chooses.

Francis gets off the steamer with his gun in hand. Everybody with cyberware has wound the springs as tight as they will go. It's show time.

The villains follow a specific plan until engaged in combat. If the opponents' side includes more than three bad guys, they split into two groups: one led by Vants, the other by Francis. They move through town by two different routes. One band rides up Train Street to the cemetery, then down to Main Street; the other rides down to the Songbird Saloon, then up Main Street. Both groups converge on the sheriff's office. If only two or three bad guys show up for the showdown, they ride past the Songbird and up Main Street to the sheriff's office.

The villains enter the office, looking for Bergamot. They do not find him there, and so they move back down Main Street, shouting taunts to draw the sheriff out. As they go, they shoot out windows and maybe even start a small fire somewhere. They move carefully but not stealthily, ready for combat at any moment.

Eventually, they work their way back to the Songbird and move inside the saloon. Vants goes upstairs, kicks open Celia's door, and drags her down to the main floor. Francis yells, "It's real easy, Bergamot. Either you come out now, nice and peaceful, or we'll see what it takes to make the little bird scream." If the player characters anticipated this move and hid Celia, the outlaws threaten to kill Porkins and torch the saloon.

If the shadowrunners decide to help take down the villains, they may make whatever plans they like, position themselves accordingly, and start the fight when they are ready. Anytime a bad guy moves within 20 meters of a player character or Bergamot, the gamemaster must make a Perception Test for the villain to see if he spots the character. However, nobody gets the advantage of surprise in this fight because everyone is expecting violence at every moment. If the runners manage to delay making their move long enough for the bad guys to get to the Songbird and take Celia (or even poor Porkins) hostage, then the initiative seems to shift to Vants and Francis. Once they utter their threat to Celia, Bergamot tries to take thém down.

Ideally, the showdown ends with Francis, Vants, and their minions ready for a trip to Boot Hill, with Bergamot and Celia alive. If the gamemaster can possibly arrange it, he may use the following ending scene.

Read the following or paraphrase it:

Francis and Bergamot stand facing each other, barely ten paces apart. You start to draw on Francis, but Bergamot holds up a hand. "My job, I think, friends."

Francis smiles. "Seems we been here before."

"Never again," Bergamot says flatly.

Francis' smile fades. "Whenever you like, sheriff."

A second ticks by. Another. A sudden, shrill scream—compelling, strangely musical—rings through the air. "Behind you!"

You whirl to see the bloody almost-corpse of Sy Vants, running on sheer hate, leveling a scattergun at you. Gunfire thunders across the town as you fire, Bergamot fires, and Francis fires, and the scattergun booms its impotent curse at the sky as Vants falls for the last time. You turn. Bergamot is standing. Francis isn't. Then you all turn toward Celia.

She holds her throat in both hands, her eyes wide and wondering. Then she steps toward you. Her hands leave her throat and touch you fleetingly on the cheek, like a kiss from a hummingbird. Her lips move.

And she says, "Thank you."

If the shadowrunners have left Bergamot to stand alone in this showdown, he starts the battle in hiding on top of the Songbird. He opens fire on the villains as they pass the saloon on their way to his office. A running battle ensues, but eventually one of the bad guys drops the sheriff. Wrong ending—too bad, chummer. Wherever the player characters are at that moment, they hear peals of hideous laughter in their heads. Trey's human face appears before them, grinning hideously as he says, "Heroes fled, music dead, nothing learned, honor burned. See you soon, dinner, see you soon." Trey's face then changes into its true form. Its needle-toothed maw gapes wide, drawing the shadowrunners into it as if in a nightmare. A mysterious force hurls them out of this metaplane and into the next adventure.

LAST WORDS

Enraged by the failure of his plans, Trey decides to cut his losses and wipe out the defenders of Valley Hope. With Bergamot gone and the troublesome interlopers destroyed or banished to other metaplanes, he can feed on the town and its inhabitants without further distractions. He no longer bothers to wear his human form, but reveals himself in his dreadful true form.

Trey first seeks to destroy Bergamot, ignoring attacks from the runners unless they actually wound him. Their presumption in hurting him infuriates Trey, who turns his full sorcerous abilities on any successful attacker.

If Trey is about to kill Bergamot, Celia throws herself in front of the sheriff and screams "No!" The Trey creature recoils at the sound, clapping one pair of hands to its ears. If the shadowrunners miss this clue, the creature recovers after a moment and turns to attack them. Hopefully someone will figure out that Celia's voice causes the monster pain. If any player says *anything* about her singing, that's close enough. At that point, Bergamot grabs Celia by the shoulders and yells "Sing!"

And she does. In every Combat Turn that Celia sings, Trey takes 10S damage. Screaming horribly, the monster tries to kill the singer; the runners must keep her alive until the monster dies. It finally explodes, sending hunks of rancid flesh and gobs of pus spinning and bouncing down the street. The smell is appalling. As Trey's last bits fall to the ground, a single white bone about the length of a man's arm (though it is not an arm bone) lands at the feet of one of the runners. They see it and know they need that bone to create the perch for the Songbird's cage (though the runners may take a minute to figure that out).

Once Trey dies and the runners recover the bone, the streets of Valley Hope waver around them. The noonday sunlight begins to flicker like a cosmic strobe, and the scene fades from the runners' sight as they are hurled into the next metaplane.

DEBUGGING

Ultimately, a showdown will occur between Trey and the runners. How many townsfolk die before that happens depends entirely on the runners' actions. Because the confrontation between Sheriff Bergamot and Dred Francis is inevitable, little can go wrong in this encounter unless the runners pointblank refuse to help (see **High Noon**, p. 75 of this section, for the consequences of that decision). If the runners attempt to flee Valley Hope, they discover that all roads lead back into the valley and that they can only avoid Trey for so long. If it becomes obvious to the gamemaster that the runners are simply ducking the fight out of cowardice, end this part of the adventure and send them spinning off to the next place, complete with the knowledge that they have failed.

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following NPCs appear only in **A Fistful of Karma.** Major NPCs are listed first, followed by cowpokes, cowpunks, and extras.

BERGAMOT

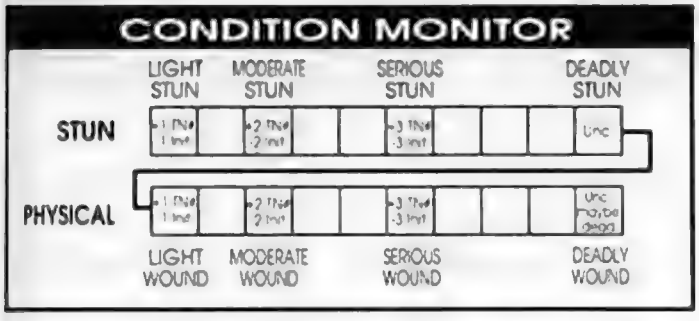
Arlen Bergamot came to Valley Hope at a time when the locals were caught between the corrupting influence of the flattop Mine (a source of pollution and a sinkhole of moral iniquity) and the vicious rule-by-force of Sy Vants and his gunslingers. Revolted by Vants' casual brutality, Bergamot threw in his lot with the town's leaders and trained up a Vigilance Committee to stand up to Vants' Blood Eagle gang (see **Legwork,** p. 70). The grateful townsfolk made him sheriff of Valley Hope, a position he has held ever since.

During the few weeks before the runners' arrival on this metaplane, the evil Mr. Trey has been subtly manipulating Bergamot, taunting him with Dred Francis' impending return and playing up his fate to face unbeatable odds alone. The support of the shadowrunners allows him to fight off Trey's suggestions of worthlessness and find his courage again.

When not in the throes of this induced torment, Bergamot acts courageously and decisively. He bears a distinct physical resemblance to Harlequin, and he is the elf's avatar in this Place.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	6	4	5	4	2	6	5	0/1

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6, Firearms 8, Leadership 4, Negotiation 6, Riding 5, Unarmed Combat 6, Whip 5
Gear: Bowie Knife, Bullwhip, Heavy Pistol in gunbelt with 12 rounds (6 argent), Heavy Rifle (loaded with argent rounds), Horse, Light Pistol in shoulder holster (no reloads), Throwing Knives in sleeves (2)



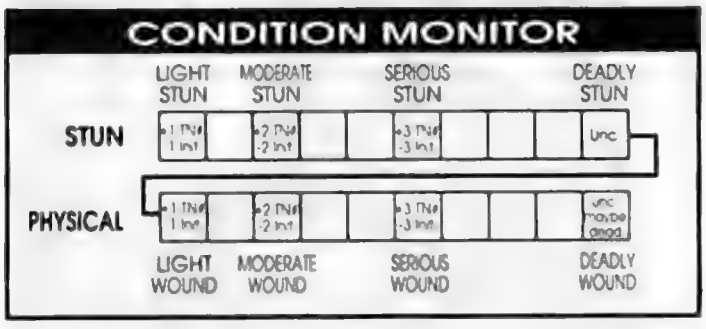
CELIA

Celia represents the valley in many ways: beautiful, kindly, brutalized by the vicious forces that seek to possess it. The return of her lost voice at a crucial moment of heroism is an important symbol that will be repeated throughout this adventure.

A compassionate woman, Celia has refused to let her terrible trauma break her will. As should be evident, she is this metaplane's incarnation of Thayla.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	4	2	6	4	5	6	4	0/1

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/3
Skills: Negotiation 4, Singing 6, Unarmed Combat 3

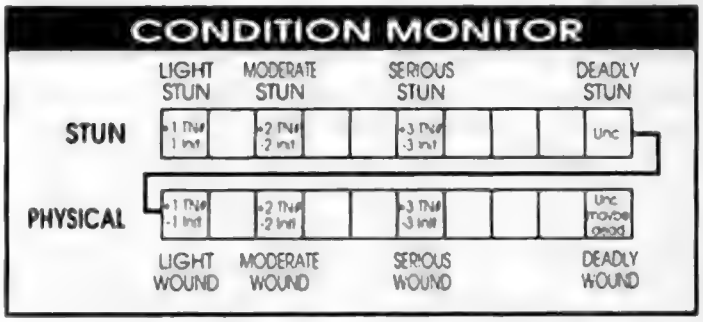


DRED FRANCIS

Francis is a killing machine: just aim him at a target and wait for the explosion. During the years of terror in their past, the citizens of Valley Hope feared no one more than Dred Francis. A courageous townsman might stand up to Sy Vants' other gunnies, but it is a rare citizen of the valley who does not feel cold fear at the mere thought of facing Dred Francis.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4 (5)	4 (6)	4 (5)	2	3	2	0	3 (7)	0/1

Initiative: 7 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6, Firearms 8, Leadership 4, Riding 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Cyberware: Cyberarm with Gun Hand [+1 Strength (Clockwork)], Cybereye with Smartgun Lens, Dermal Armor 1 (Animal Bond), Muscle Implant 2 (Animal Bond), Wired Reflexes 2 (Clockwork)
Gear: Bowie Knife, Heavy Pistol in gunbelt with 12 reloads (plus Gun Hand)

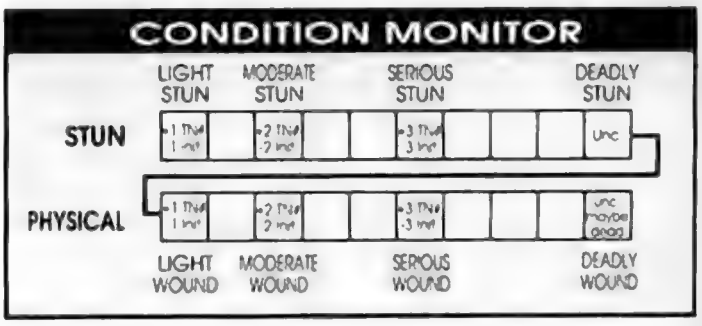


SY VANTS

Sy Vants combines the formidable abilities of a physical adept with wealth and a nearly insane lust for power. He is Trey's principal tool for the corruption of the valley, and the adventure's apparent main villain. He is also the avatar of the dark warrior.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
5 (6)	6	6	4	3	3	6	6	4	0/1

Initiative: 4 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6, Firearms 6, Leadership 3, Negotiation 4, Riding 8, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers: Improved Body 1, Improved Unarmed Combat Skill 3, Increased Reflexes 1, Pain Resistance 5
Gear: Heavy Pistols (2) in two-gun belt with 12 reloads (all argent), Heavy Rifle, Horse, Saber



TREY

Trey is this Place's avatar of Mr. Darke, the twisted human ally of the Enemy that the runners meet in **The Bridge, Part Three** (p. 143). In a reflection of Darke's evil nature, Trey can appear in both human and monstrous forms. In his human form, he bears a distinct resemblance to Oscuro from **Aftermath** (see p. 53). Like the dreadful creatures he serves, Trey feeds on human misery and possesses ample power with which to create a bumper crop of his favorite food. The legacy of polluted nature and twisted humanity at the Flattop Mine drew him to the valley. Over the past year he has slowly gained control of the area through his human pawns; once control is assured he plans to reopen the mine, less to extract phlogiston than to destroy the valley's ecology and feast on the residents' resultant agony.

Human Form

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
7	8 x 3	4	6	6	6	8	8	17	6/4

Initiative: 17 + 1D6

True Form

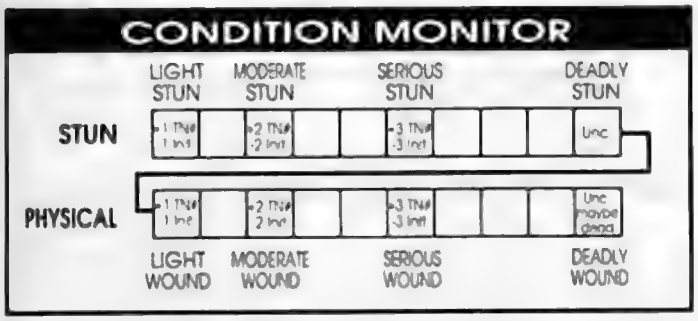
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
9	10 x 3	6	8	8	8	8	8	19	6/4

Initiative: 19 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Negotiation 8, Riding 3, Sorcery 8, Unarmed Combat 8
Spells: Fire Magic
Powers: Icy Hand*, Suggestion**, Teleport***

*This power allows Trey to paralyze a single target with terror. To use the icy hand power, make a Sorcery Test for Trey against the target's Willpower or Sorcery, whichever is higher. If Trey achieves any successes, his victim can only cringe and cower for a number of Combat Turns equal to the successes rolled. Trey may use this power in his human or true form.

**When Trey successfully uses his Negotiation Skill against a target or target group, roll Trey's Sorcery Skill dice against Target Number 6. If the test is successful, Trey can trigger a single motivation in the listener: fear, greed, sorrow, obedience, and so on. Unless the target has some important reason to resist, the suggested motive takes hold of him. The more successes Trey achieves, the more compelling is the suggestion.

***Trey can teleport to or from anywhere in the valley at will, but only at night. By day he must walk or ride horses, which he loathes. No test is necessary to use this power.



COWPOKES

Cowpokes have no special abilities or powers over and above the skills listed in their statistics below. They are moderately handy in a fight against unskilled opponents. Cowpokes employed by Sy Vants are particularly dangerous because they use deadly force with no concern for right or wrong. This propensity for excessive violence gives them a Threat Rating of 1 and Professional Rating of 2.

If needed, use the condition monitors provided at the end of this book in addition to the ones provided here. Statistics for each race of cowpoke appear below; all have the same Initiative, Threat/Professional Rating, Skills, and Gear.

Dwarf Cowpoke

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	2	5	3	3	4	6	2	0/1

Elf Cowpoke

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	4	3	5	3	3	6	3	0/1

Human Cowpoke

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	0/1

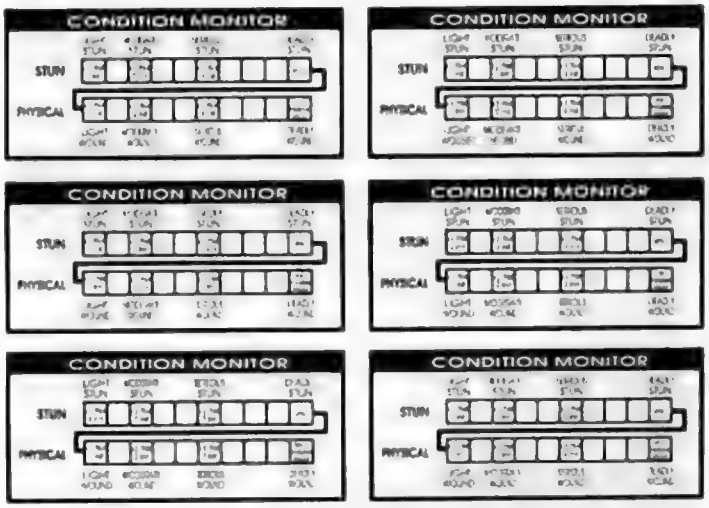
Ork Cowpoke

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
6	3	5	2	2	3	6	2	0/1

Troll Cowpoke

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
8 (9)	2	7	1	1	2	6	1	0/1

Initiative: (Reaction) + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/2
Skills: Firearms 5, Riding 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Bowie Knife, Carbine, Heavy Pistol in gunbelt with 6 rounds, Mount (appropriate type)



COWPUNKS

As elite gunslingers, cowpunks possess both cyberware and animal bonds and so make either dangerous opponents or valuable allies. All cowpunks carry the following gear: a heavy pistol in a gunbelt with 12 rounds (in addition to any Gun

Hands), a light rifle, a Bowie knife, and an appropriate mount. If needed, use the condition monitors provided at the end of this book in addition to the ones provided below.

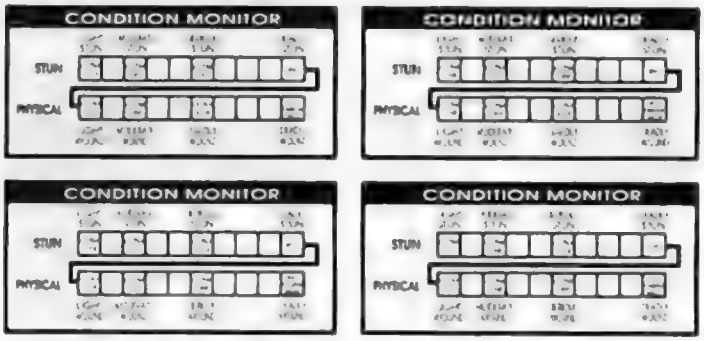
Elf Cowpunk

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	7 (8)	3 (4)	2	3	2	.6	5 (9)	0/1

Initiative: 9 + 3D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 2/3

Cyberware: Cyberarm with Gun Hand; Cybereye with Smartgun, Thermographic and Telescopic Lenses; Muscle Replacement 1 (Animal Bond); Wired Reflexes 2 (Clockwork)



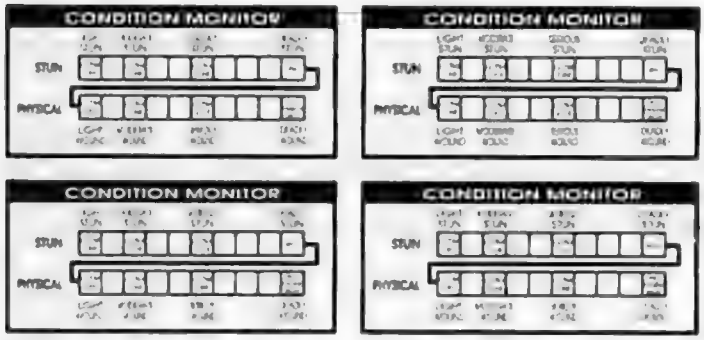
Human Cowpunk

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
6 (8)	4 (6)	6 (8)	2	5	5	0	5 (9)	0/1

Initiative: 9 + 3D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 2/3

Cyberware: Cyberarm with Gun Hand and Sword Hand; Cybereye with Smartgun, Low-Light Lenses; Dermal Armor 2 (Animal Bond); Muscle Replacement 2 (Animal Bond); Wired Reflexes 2 (Clockwork)



Troll Cowpunk

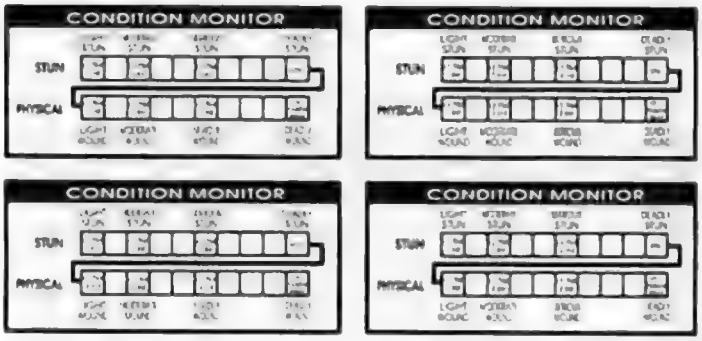
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
7 (8)	3 (7)	6 (10)	1	2	1	0	2 (4)	0/1

Initiative: 4 + 2D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 2/3

Cyberware: Muscle Replacement 4 (Animal Bond), Wired Reflexes 1 (Clockwork)

Skills: Armed Combat 4, Firearms 6, Riding 6, Unarmed Combat 6



EXTRAS

The statistics for extras apply to every other NPC in the adventure: townsfolk, settlers, steamer passengers, and so on. For children, reduce the Physical Attributes listed below by 1 point. Do the same for elderly extras, but increase their Mental Attributes by 1 point as well. Attributes vary by race; all, however, have the same Initiative, Threat/Professional Rating, skills, and gear.

Dwarf Extra

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	2	5	3	3	4	6	2	0/1

Elf Extra

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	4	3	5	3	3	6	3	0/1

Human Extra

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	0/1

Ork Extra

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
6	3	5	2	2	3	6	2	0/1

Troll Extra

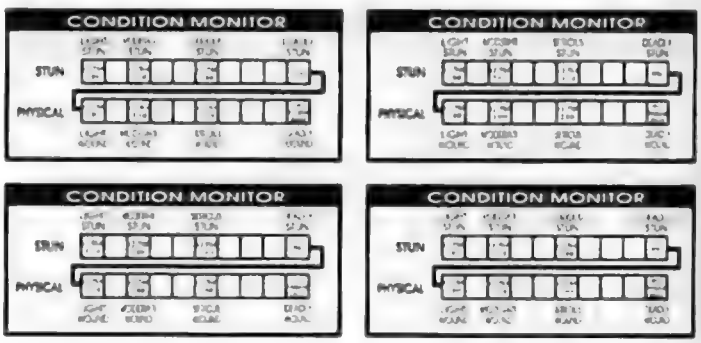
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
8 (9)	2	7	1	1	2	6	1	0/1

Initiative: Reaction + 1D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 0/1

Skills: Firearms 3, Riding 4, Unarmed Combat 2. Characters with a given profession also have Rating 6 in that profession's skill(s). For example, Doc Wunderlich has Medicine 6 and First Aid 6. Mrs. Venturi, the herbalist, has Enchanting 6. A saloonkeeper like Perkins or a typical merchant has Negotiation and Etiquette 6, and so on.

Gear: Many townsfolk are not armed. Armed townsmen carry a light pistol in a gunbelt, but no reloads. Women are more likely to carry a derringer, if anything. Settlers typically carry a light pistol (no reloads) and may also pack a light rifle or shotgun if expecting trouble. Most folks also have a mount of some kind.



BY THE SWORD

"And there by ordinance of the Queen was set a quest of ladies on Sir Gawaine, and they judged him forever while he lived to be with all ladies, and to fight for their quarrels ... "

—Malory, Book III

OVERVIEW

The emphases in this quote belong to the author of this adventure.

"Dear kinsman by blood, I am in sorry plight. For now my honour has departed and my struggle is ended ... My courage and my valour stemmed wholly from him, my counsel, my succour that sustained my spirit. *The knight of knights* in Christendom, *thou wert worthy to be king*, though I wore the crown. Mine good fortune, my good name on earth were gained through Sir Gawayne, and through his wisdom alone. Alas," said Arthur, "now my sorrow increases. I *am utterly destroyed in mine own land*. Ah, treacherous, cruel Death, thou lingerest too long! Why dost thou hold back? Thou overwhelmest my spirit."

—The Alliterative Morte d'Arthur

In this adventure, the runners must find and obtain the sword of Lancelot, which they will take to another Place and use the metal to build the Songbird's cage. First they must find Lancelot, now an old, broken man, who reveals that he long ago broke his sword and lost the broken piece. To mend the sword, the runners must visit the island on which Castle Maydenlande stands and pass a number of symbolic trials of honor and integrity. Within the castle itself, a guardian crone bars the way to Gawaine's great hall, and the runners must overcome her to recover the remainder of the broken blade. Carrying both pieces of the sword, the runners return to Lancelot, who must now perform a final act of atonement for his great transgression. The runners must also rescue a mysterious, simple youth during the course of this adventure. The Priestesses of the Place, who live on the Isle of Apples, may provide important information and crucial assistance during this adventure.

This adventure makes many demands on the gamemaster and requires that the player characters willingly undergo several difficult tests and trials. The fact that the players may believe they know the history of this Place creates special problems, because most of the Arthurian lore the players are likely familiar with does NOT apply here. The following background information outlines the past events and current condition of this Place.

THE PAGAN LAND

This adventure is set in a pagan Place that is derived from the early Arthurian writings, rather than the Christianized, secondary Continental romances. The events here also have no relationship to the Grail romances. The two key male protagonists of the drama—Lancelot and Gawaine—develop as very different characters than those portrayed in later Arthurian writings, which are probably the players' main source of information.

In the early tales, on which this adventure setting is based, Lancelot is not the finest knight of Arthur's court; he is a traitor who betrays his king out of lust for Guinevere, not for spiritual love. In the course of the pagan version of the story, Lancelot slays the brothers Gareth and Gawaine (Arthur's nephew), both knights of Arthur's court, and thus leaves Arthur vulnerable to Mordred's machinations against the king.

Despite his betrayal of Arthur, Lancelot remains a tragic figure, for he has struggled for many years to become a Christian knight and to espouse the virtues of courtly chivalry. But Lancelot's efforts are doomed, for he is half fay—half of the bloodline of Avalon itself. He knows that as Christianity grows in power, the ancient and mysterious world of the Isle of Apples will fade and the route from Avalon to this world/Place will become more difficult to find. Half of his being feels keenly the sadness of this loss, for he is losing half of himself. His broken sword symbolizes his inner division, the fracture he caused between he and Arthur, and the dichotomy between his actions as a knight and the ideals of knighthood. Before his broken sword can be mended, Lancelot must complete his atonement for his betrayal of Arthur by accepting that he cannot exorcise half of his being—a long-denied admission that should cause him great pain and make him an even more tragic figure.

The second key male protagonist—Gawaine—is the finest knight of the Round Table in this adventure setting. The writers who penned the later, Christianized Arthurian tales painted Gawaine in dark colors, some even portraying him as a rapist and murderer of women. But the earlier texts depict a different Gawaine. This Gawaine enjoys the favors of women, true, but women readily offer themselves to him. As a pagan, Gawaine knows that accepting these favors is not sinful. He refuses the attention of married women (unlike Lancelot), and rescues imprisoned women (the Besieged Lady is a standard motif in his adventures, and he plays a central role in the rape/rescue myth of the Flower Bride). In these tales, the myriad women Gawaine serves are symbolic aspects of the pagan Goddess. In turn, Gawaine is an aspect of the eternal Champion of the Goddess, the Horned God/King who represents the natural cycle of the seasons, of death, and rebirth.

In this adventure, Gawaine represents the life of the Place where the runners find themselves. Because Gawaine is dead, the Place is barren. He cannot be returned to life, but Lancelot's atonement for slaying Gawaine breaks the enchantment/curse on Gawaine's son Guinglainn, who then can take his father's place as the new champion. His freedom allows the cycle of seasons to begin anew. Lancelot's broken sword can be mended, and so becomes suitable for use as the base metal of the Songbird's cage.

Cross-Gender Roleplaying

The symbolism of the Place in this adventure dictates that the player characters' group include at least one female runner and one male runner. No male can serve as a Priestess of Avalon, and no female can serve as Champion of the Goddess. But do not confuse character gender with player gender. Nothing prevents a female player from roleplaying a male runner, and vice versa. If necessary, Jane Foster can substitute for the female runner.

The female runner also should have a high Essence Rating. If she is a shaman, subtract 1 from all target numbers when she deals with the Priestesses of Avalon. If the female shaman follows a druidic totem (see pp. 28–32, **Grimoire II**, for information on druids), subtract 2 from these target numbers.

BUT WE KNOW THIS ...

The gamemaster must assume that players will try to draw on their knowledge of popular Arthurian tales to interpret events and react to characters in this adventure. But as the preceding sketches of Gawaine and Lancelot show, this adventure setting is based on versions of the Arthurian tale that few people are likely to know. Even the Grail theme is different. In these pagan tales, the Goddess' Cauldron often took the place of the Grail chalice/cup. In the Place the runners visit, the Round Table knights made no Grail quests. No Perceval or Galahad figures in this universe. Rather, Lancelot knows that the Grail belongs to the Goddess and represents a source of spiritual wisdom. He fears that the Grail may overwhelm his

Christian self-ideal, and he knows Gawaine has taken sustenance from it as Champion of the Goddess. If runners ask Lancelot about the Grail, he looks pained and fearful and crosses himself. If they ask Gawaine, he smiles and quietly tells them they are not ready to understand the Grail mysteries.

Runners, especially mages, may refer to Merlin at some point. Merlin is one of the names of the Welsh magician/bard known as Taliesin, but Taliesin has no direct association with the events that occur in this Place. Lancelot crosses himself as if warding away some evil if Merlin is mentioned; Gawaine remembers him as an old friend; the Priestesses of Avalon smile at the mention of the bard but say nothing of him.

Player characters may bring up Mordred as well. Gawaine knows of Arthur's death only through Viviane, the Priestess of Avalon, and Nimue, the Lady of the Lake. Lancelot knows of that event only through secondhand tales. Neither can give any direct account of Arthur's death. In this Place, Mordred himself was slain shortly after killing Arthur. Viviane achieved this through ritual sorcery, but this is known only to her, Gawaine, Nimue, and the other Priestesses. Gawaine and the women are not going to tell the runners the truth of such matters, and Lancelot knows only that Mordred is dead. All other major knights are long dead, as is Guinevere.

THE MAGICAL LAND

Certain magic rules apply to the entirety of this Place. The Background Count is 2 for all locations, save the Isle of Apples, which has a Background Count of 5 (see p. 89, the **Grimoire, Second Edition,** for applicable rules). Any hostile creatures and people the runners encounter have protection from the magic of the Place, which provides them with Armor Ratings of Impact/Ballistic 3, unless otherwise noted.

Assensing the land generally gives the magician the definite sensation that this Place is barren, save for the Isle of Apples. This condition seems obvious from the land's appearance, but assensing should always strengthen the visual impression.

Elementals may be conjured here without the use of a conjuring library, but any spirits summoned are half the expected strength (halve the spirit's Force Rating, rounding fractions down). That even the spirits appear weaker here also reflects the barrenness of the land. Any Priestess can automatically control any conjured elemental or spirit. Such elementals and spirits cannot be forced to oppose or obstruct a Priestess. Also, any Priestess can dispel any elemental or spirit automatically, without the need for a dispelling attempt.

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION

The runners come to this Place dressed in their own clothing and equipped with their usual gear. Obviously, the runners look somewhat out of Place, as it were, as their attire and gear appear wholly out of context. Each non-player character reacts differently to the runners' physical appearance.

The Priestesses show no visible reaction to the way the runners look. They represent the Power of this Place and they don't sweat such small details. Guinglainn shows no surprise, because he is amnesiac and doesn't remember what people ought to look like anyway.

Lancelot finds the runners so confusing that he cannot converse coherently for 6 minutes upon meeting them. Ask the runners to make an Etiquette (6) Test before they speak to Lancelot. For every success generated, reduce this time by 1 minute. For the minutes during which the old knight is confused, he asks them suspiciously and repeatedly who they are and where they come from. Lancelot also wards away elves with the sign of the cross because he associates them with the world of faeries. For all the runners' dealings with Lancelot, increase all target numbers by 1 if the group includes elven runners. He also reacts adversely to mages or shamans; increase all target numbers by 1 if the group includes magicians. Runners can avoid these cumulative penalties by simply leaving their elven mates and their spellcasters behind when they deal with Lancelot or by disguising them (Lancelot has no way of recognizing a spellcaster, though he knows a Priestess when he sees one). Lancelot looks slightly askance at trolls, orks, and dwarfs, but they look human enough to him.

Berclak (the Winter Champion) shows surprise at the runners' appearance and some interest in their armor and gear. He assumes that their weapons work by magic if shown how they operate or what they do. He dislikes trolls because he associates them with giants, and he refuses to permit any troll into his home (see **Castle Maydenlande**, p. 98). The presence of troll runners does not otherwise affect the group's dealings with Berclak.

THE AVATARS

The Enemy does not directly manifest in this place. All of the runners' trials come from within, and so the Enemy itself need not challenge the heroes.

Harlequin shows up in two guises. The first is as Lancelot, but the resemblance is quite vague, as the knight is quite old and appears very different than he might have in his youth. His resemblance to Harlequin becomes quite striking when Lancelot shows his guilt over his murder of Gawaine.

The elf also appears during the very last scene. When Guinglainn takes on the form of the Spring Champion he suddenly bears a sharp resemblance to Harlequin, though at no time before this does the young man resemble the elf.

Gawaine resembles Ehran the Scribe in many ways. Runners who participated in the original **Harlequin** adventure may pick up on this similarity more easily than those who know him only through his media appearances. The gamemaster must decide how much to stress the likeness.

Also, Viviane bears an inexplicable resemblance to Jane Foster, which is noted in the description of the Priestess. In this case, the likeness is coincidental and bears no significance in the story.

AT THE FOUNTAIN

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Your senses reel, then suddenly a harsh, biting cold replaces the vertigo. You struggle to your feet, and the hard crust of the ground crunches slightly underfoot. Winding as the cold hits your face and exposed skin, you turn to survey your surroundings.

Sparse, mostly deciduous trees grow all around you, leaving only the bare path you stand on without vegetation. You hear the sound of your own breathing, the small sounds of your fellow runners, and somewhere out there, the sounds of animals and birds.

Your breath swirls into a freezing mist in front of you. It is obviously winter in this Place, but something tells you this land is dead—something else is responsible for the barrenness.

You hear an unfamiliar noise, turn, and see the ghostly form of what seems to be a young boy standing a dozen or so meters down the path. A fine, blurry halo of white and blue light accents the figure. He is turned away from you, facing the side of the path and bent over slightly, as though he were talking to something or someone on the ground. He wears a heavy, dark woolen cloak, with a hood that conceals most of his face. As you move closer he speaks, addressing something you cannot see.

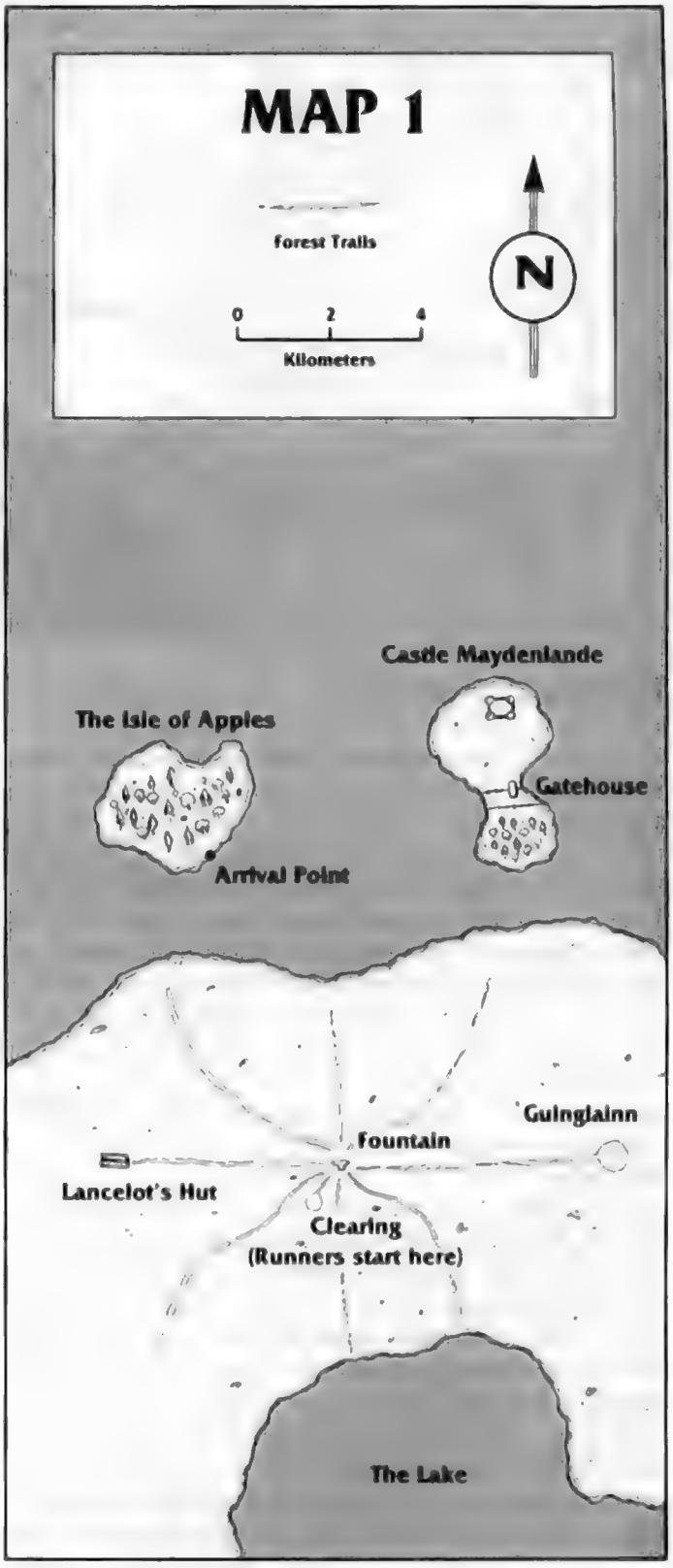
"There is truth there, evident and yet beyond understanding," he says. "Hope as well, my friend, but not now, not for some time. Prices must be paid, and though you pay yours now, the balance is still askew." He pauses and cocks his head as if listening to a reply. "Perhaps, but your concerns are not of this world any longer. In time, someone will come and find the sword that ran through the best and finest Knight of the Round Table. But those days are not here, and those ways not mine to command."

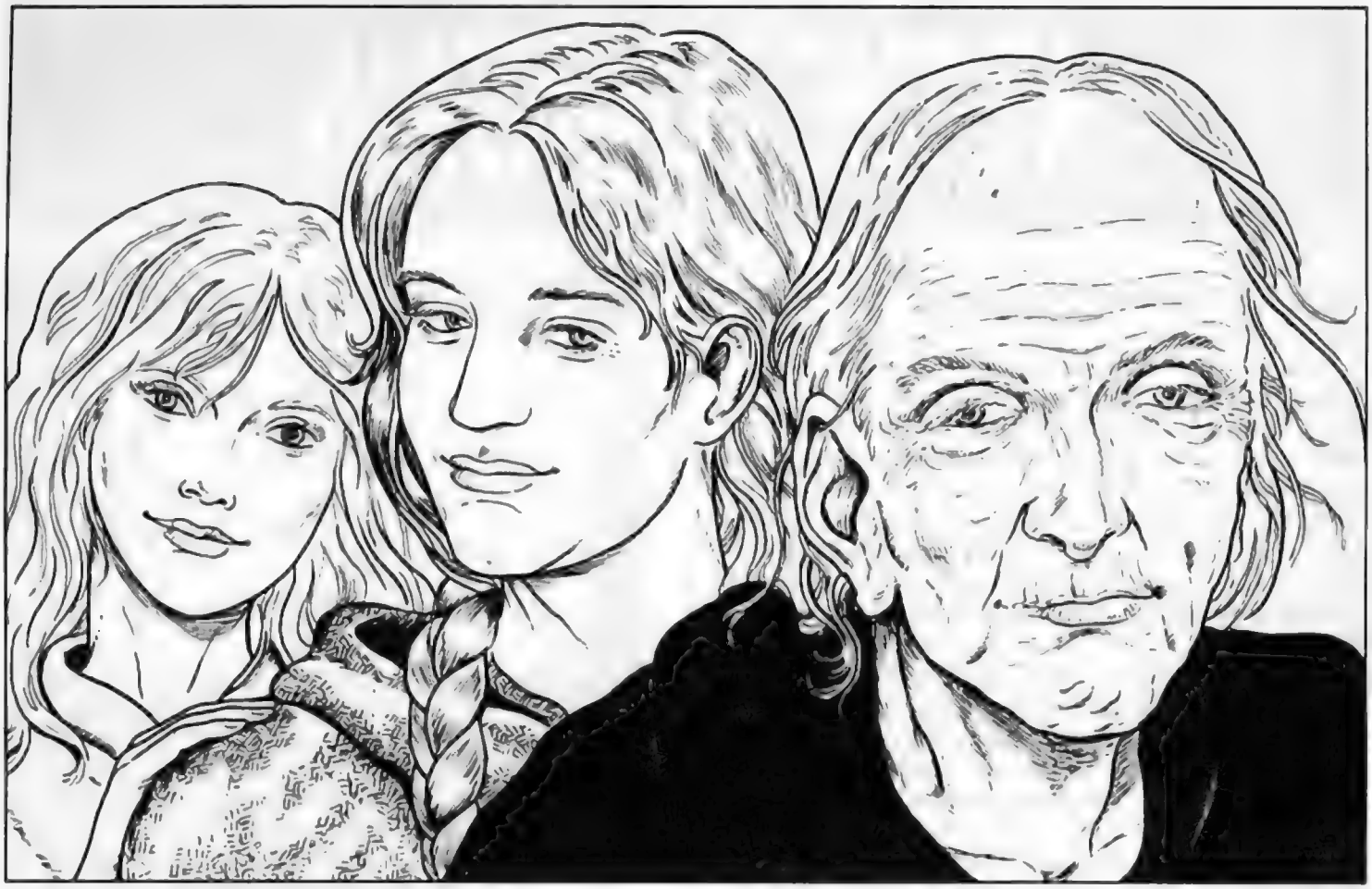
The vision then fades.

HOOKS

This is a Place and land of high magic. The symbolic and mythological nature of the setting should become apparent once the runners begin interacting with the environment. Use carefully worded, mysterious descriptions to evoke the distinct, almost palpable sense of otherworldliness here.

The runners, dressed for the streets of Seattle, have walked into a fairy tale—one distinctly unlike any they ever heard as children.





BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners find themselves in the position shown on Map 1, in a clearing between two of the eight paths that lead to a fountain. The lightly wooded land is in the grip of winter, with temperatures hovering around 10 degrees below freezing. Frost covers the bare trees, and the ground is hard underfoot. A few small animals and birds move among the brush, and the runners' breath freezes in the chill air. If the runners step away from the paths into the woodlands, they eventually return to the same path on which they started, regardless of the direction they think they're walking. The runners quickly lose their sense of direction away from the paths, which can be pointed out to the team if they keep straying. The runners can clearly identify the inland lake to the south of them by the smell of fresh water.

From their starting point, the runners will inevitably find the nexus of the paths, at which stands a small pavilion. Outside this tent, three women sit next to a small fountain. Water bubbles from the fountain and seeps into the surrounding ground. One woman, Anna, is about 60 years of age, white-haired and dressed in black. A second woman, Gwyar, is about 30, with brown hair and red clothing. The third woman, Bellsent, is 15 years old, dressed in white, with fine, honey-blond hair. All wear long dresses of simple design, with belts and neck scarves, and seem quite comfortable in the cold. All three women share the same fine, fair skin, green eyes, and medium build, and each possesses a special beauty (see also notes on Viviane, p. 95). Anna, Gwyar, and Bellsent are Priestesses. Use Viviane's statistics (p. 95) for them if necessary. The Priestesses do not show any special interest in the runners, but they converse readily enough if spoken to. The Priestesses remain at this place until the runners have seen Viviane (see **The Isle of Apples**, p. 92). Then they leave and can no longer provide information. They serve primarily as guides to help the runners avoid mistakes and to direct them to what they seek. The three speak almost as one person, because they are aspects of one and the same thing.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Runners must talk to the Priestesses politely and with respect. If they treat them otherwise, the women refuse to help. The runners may ask the trio many questions, especially if the group returns to the fountain after finding/freeing Guinglainn or meeting Lancelot. The most likely questions they may ask elicit the following answers from the women. As a general rule, the Priestesses do not volunteer information in response to broad "help us" questions (e.g., "what should we do now?"). The single exception to this is noted in the following passage.

Where do we find the finest knight?

The Priestesses will not identify the finest knight for the runners. The runners must learn this information on their own.

If asked his name, the Priestesses say simply, "he who serves us." If the runners assume the finest knight is Lancelot, Anna smiles and comments on the runners' relative youth. Any of the three Priestesses will tell the runners where they can find Lancelot, however. If the runners mention Gawaine and ask his whereabouts, the Priestesses tell them the knight is in Castle Maydenlande, and point out the direction in which the castle lies.

Where is the sword that ran through the finest knight?

The Priestesses tell the runners that the sword is broken. Part of it lies with "he who overcame the finest knight," and part with "he who was overcome." If the runners have visited Lancelot and ask whether the broken sword he holds is the sword in question, the Priestesses make comments of the "If you ask that question you already know the answer" variety. If the runners then ask where the missing tip of the sword lies, the Priestesses look away to the northeast but give no answer in words. If the runners ask whether the broken sword alone is enough for their purposes, the Priestesses shake their heads. If the runners ask if the broken sword can be mended when they find the tip, the Priestesses say yes, but they will not reveal how this can be done. However, a successful Perception (6) Test allows a runner to notice that Anna looks briefly toward the northeast if someone asks this question.

Why is the land so barren?

The Priestesses look pleased if the runners ask this question. Belisent says that the Champion of Spring is doubly lost to the land (a reference to his imprisonment and the enchantment/curse on him). If the runners have Guinglainn with them and ask if this is the one to whom Belisent refers, she smiles again but does not actually confirm this directly.

How can we reach the islands?

The Priestesses tell the runners that both islands are magical, fay, and dangerous places. Anna tells them that "no man may set foot on the Isle of Apples and live." They mean man literally, in this case. A female runner or NPC can set foot on the island safely. If the runners suspect this and ask this specific question, the Priestesses smile but do not speak. An Essence (6) Test enables a female runner to guess that the true answer to this query is yes.

The Priestesses offer little more information about the islands. They will tell the runners that patience and waiting for messengers is a wise course of action, but they will not elaborate on this advice.

Guinglainn

Runners may return to the fountain after locating Guinglainn and ask for the Priestesses' advice or help, to free him. The Priestesses cannot offer any assistance for this task. The runners must free him themselves. Once they have done that, however, they may return to the fountain with him and ask to be told his name. The Priestesses still won't reveal his name or identity, but Gwyar rewards them with the gift of the green-tinged belt around her waist. Gwyar ties the belt around the waist of the male runner with the best combination of strength and charisma. "Strength" here means a combination of Body and Strength Attribute Ratings, and combat skills (the gamemaster makes this decision). The belt may be removed only by a Priestess, and it is important later in the adventure.

Also, Belisent appears especially happy to see Guinglainn, and looks expectantly at the runners; obviously, there is something more they have to do.

Lancelot

If the runners ask questions about Lancelot before they find him, the Priestesses give only enigmatic replies. Once the runners meet Lancelot (see **The Traitor Knight**, p. 88), they have access to much more information. The Priestesses do not reveal any information about Lancelot the runners have not learned already from the knight himself, but they do confirm information Lancelot has provided. If a runner guessed something about Lancelot and refrained from questioning him directly to spare the knight embarrassment, the Priestesses confirm the accuracy of that guess—rather enigmatically, of course.

Arthur and Avalon

If asked where Avalon lies, the Priestesses look toward the Isle of Apples. They confirm that Arthur's body lies there as well, if the runners ask.

The Lake

The Priestesses say nothing of the Lake.

Offering Their Services

Runners may ask the Priestesses if they may perform some service for the women. If the runners make this offer in the right spirit—as a genuine offer of help and not with the blatant expectations of a reward—the Priestesses look around them at the cold, barren woodland and then look pointedly at the runners. They give no further clues.

From here the runners need to find Lancelot (see **The Traitor Knight**, p. 88) or Guinglainn (see **Spring Lost in Winter**, p. 90). If they choose to go elsewhere, they make no progress until they have found both these men.

DEBUGGING

Failing to ask the right questions will delay the runners, but it should not prevent them from achieving their final goal eventually. The only way the runners can really mess things up is by taking a hostile attitude toward the Priestesses. If they make any threatening gestures toward the women, approximately six spirits and elementals appear per runner (bear in mind the magical skill ratings of the Priestesses). These spirits protect the Priestesses, who throw a stack of Force 30 chaotic world spells at the runners and depart at once. Increase all target numbers for the runners by 2 for the remainder of their sojourn in this Place.

THE TRAITOR KNIGHT

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Again you find yourself walking through the forest, as it seems you are fated to do in this Place. Around you, the woods remain cold and silent, except for the faint sounds of birds and animals. The path curves, and through the trees ahead you can make out a faint trail and the bluish haze of smoke. The odor of burning wood reaches your nose.

For one unreasoning moment fear grips you, but you quickly realize these woods would provide little fuel for a forest fire. Then you enter a small clearing. A rough stone hut marks the center. Smoke rises from the hut's crude chimney, then slowly drifts back toward the ground.

On one side of the hut sits a large pile of chopped half-frozen wood and the dulled axe undoubtedly used to divide the logs. You hear no sounds, see no other signs of life. The hut has a single unadorned door, with no apparent door knocker or handle.

HOOKS

See **At the Fountain,** p. 85, for information on the atmosphere of the woods.

BEHIND THE SCENES

See Map 1, p. 85, for the location of Lancelot's simple stone hut. A large pile of chopped wood and a timber-felling axe stand next to the hut. A small stone well lies just west of the hut. A simple wooden door provides the only entry to it. A thin trail of blue smoke rises into the sky from a hole atop the hut. The hut contains an uncomfortable-looking pallet bed, a crude wooden table and chair, a few utensils, and a meager pantry of food. Numerous Christian icons are scattered throughout the hut, and Lancelot's sword—which has the tip broken off—is wrapped in plain cloth and stored beneath the pallet bed.

The runners could easily enter the hut without invitation, but they should knock at the door and wait for Lancelot to answer. The runners should treat the old knight with respect. His suffering shows in the lines on his face, and he deserves the runners' compassion. Alone and old, Lancelot has lost everyone he loved and now lives out his days in solitude.

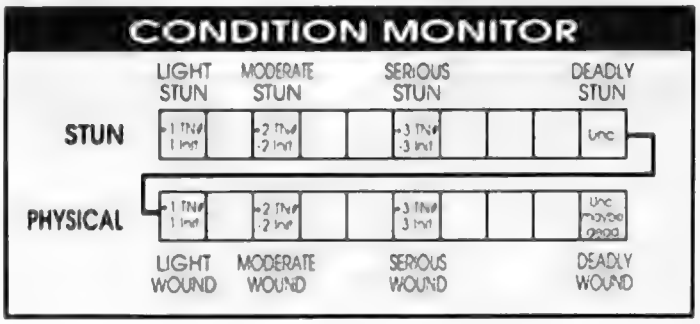
Showing Lancelot compassion will help the runners obtain information from the old knight, as well as the broken sword.

Lancelot

Lancelot is stooped with age. He appears to be 70 or so, tall with a medium build, gray hair, and hazel eyes. Arthritis has twisted the joints of his fingers, and the cold makes them swell painfully. Lancelot is clearly depressed, and he speaks slowly with a great deal of effort, his conversation marked by long pauses, sighs, and hand wringing. (Don't overdo this—you want pathos, not bathos.)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	2	5	6	6	6	6	4	0

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 2/1
Skills: Armed Combat 4 (Sword 8), Etiquette (Court) 8, Leadership 8, Military History (Albion) 10, Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Chain Mail Armor (6/4), Sword (Normal, 7M, + 1 Reach), Sword (Broken)



TALKING TO THE KNIGHT

Lancelot hesitates slightly before introducing himself, as if ashamed. A Perception (6) Test reveals the hesitation, which may hint that Lancelot is not the finest knight. The runners may well be puzzled by this. If they don't make a Perception Test at this point, they should learn the truth through further interrogation. They can ask Lancelot many questions. Base the answers he provides on the following information.

Of the Sword and the Finest Knight

The runners should tell Lancelot why they are in this Place. If they do not offer that information, he asks before he volunteers any answers. If they explain their quest truthfully, Lancelot again hesitates and looks very uncomfortable. Have the runners make a Perception (6) Test. One success means the runners notice his hesitation. Two or more successes allow the runners to see that his discomfort stems from them touching on a subject of which he is very ashamed.

If the runners suggest that Lancelot is the finest knight, he looks pained, shakes his head, and falls silent. He is deeply reluctant to tell the runners the name of the finest knight. A successful Essence (6) Test persuades him to reveal the name

of the finest knight. Reduce the target number by 1 if Lancelot is questioned by a clearly sympathetic female runner (make this call based on roleplaying). If the test succeeds, Lancelot breaks down and tells the runners that he slew Arthur's finest knight, the king's nephew, while in the grip of a frenzied passion. Lancelot's remorse and regret is infinite, and he wishes out loud that he had been slain that fateful day rather than emerging victorious. Lancelot's admission contains a bit of self-pity, but his remorse and sense of tragedy is genuine. This scene should be tragic. Lancelot knows he sealed Arthur's fate and the fate of this Place that day. He doesn't identify Gawaine as the finest knight, but if the runners ask directly whether the knight is Gawaine, Lancelot nods mutely.

The runners may show surprise and say that they took him, not Gawaine, to be the finest knight of the Round Table. Lancelot demurs at this, saying that skill at arms and loyalty to king were the best measure of a great knight. On the former count he could lay claim to be Gawaine's equal, but hardly on the latter count! If a runner makes a successful Perception + Essence (9) Test, he discerns that Lancelot is still holding something back. If the runner presses the point gently, Lancelot impulsively takes a bronze cross from the table, holds it hard to his chest and seems to labor for breath for a few moments. At this point, have the runner who is doing the questioning make an Essence (6) Test. If the runner achieves any successes, he experiences a gut-level sense that Lancelot has some fay, strange quality within him that the old knight is struggling to suppress, as he holds the symbol of his adopted faith so tightly to himself. Aura assensing might reveal this anyway (at the gamemaster's discretion), but the realization has extra potency if it occurs in this context.

If the runner presses on and tries to home in on what torments Lancelot, the old man becomes incoherent. He holds hard to the cross and recites a simple prayer over and over. Tell the runner that he can sense that Lancelot's inner turmoil relates both to the old knight himself and to some other quality that gave the finest knight his status and pride of place. That quality is the touch of the Goddess, though the runners aren't likely to recognize it at this stage.

If the runners push this scene even further and say outright that the finest knight must be Gawaine and that Lancelot murdered him, the old knight throws himself to the floor and weeps pitifully. No further conversation with him is possible after this, unless the runners try to take the broken sword from beneath his bed.

Gaining the Sword

The runners can take the sword from Lancelot in three ways. First, they can take it by force. Lancelot tries to prevent such attempts and puts up as much of a struggle as he can using the intact sword, but he cries for mercy if he suffers a Light wound. If the runners take the sword by force, increase all test target numbers by 2 for the rest of this adventure.

Second, the runners can persuade Lancelot to give up the sword voluntarily by explaining that they need it to complete their quest. If they tell him the truth, Lancelot is moved by the tale of Thayla and the need for metal for the Songbird's cage, and he reluctantly turns over the Sword to them. If they lie, determine whether their story is plausible (they really don't need to lie, so be tough on them). If the story is not plausible, Lancelot refuses to give up the sword and the runners must admit they've lied and tell the truth (make a Charisma (6) Test for the runners to see if Lancelot is willing to accept the true story).

Third, the runners might take the sword using magic or a deception of some kind (e.g., a suitable manipulation spell). But such skullduggery represents a dishonesty not in accord with the story line here. If the runners choose this route anyway, increase all subsequent test target numbers by 1 for the remainder of the adventure.

Miscellanea

Runners may ask Lancelot about Arthur, any of the great knights, Guinevere (not terribly tactful), or many other Arthurian topics, possibly as a way to pass the time while they try to gain the knight's trust. Base Lancelot's responses on the information provided in **The Pagan Land** and **But We Know This** ... sections of **By the Sword,** p. 82.

Guinglainn

If the runners have Guinglainn with them when they meet Lancelot, Lancelot does not allow the boy into his hut. The old knight is plainly agitated by the boy's presence and the fact that he has been freed, and makes the sign of the cross as if to ward himself against Guinglainn. He absolutely refuses to speak of the boy. A mage using a mind-reading spell may detect in Lancelot's mind an image of Gawaine (see **Meeting Gawaine** in **Castle Maydenlande,** p. 101) as an older version of the boy.

THE BROKEN SWORD

The sword Lancelot gives them is a plain, long sword with the tip (about 16–18 centimeters) broken off, which leaves an irregular fracture at the end of the blade. Undoubtedly, the runners will want to know where the rest of the sword is, especially if any mage among them detects that the sword is in no way magical (nor, for reference, is the intact sword Lancelot wears at his waist). Lancelot remembers for a moment the horror of the sword tip breaking off in Gawaine's flank as he slew him, and a mage with a suitable mind-reading spell may be able to detect this. Lancelot will not tell the runners where the tip can be found. If the runners press him about Gawaine's whereabouts, Lancelot crosses himself again and looks toward the northern shoreline.

From this encounter, the runners can return to the Priestesses (see **At the Fountain,** p. 86), they can find Guinglainn if they haven't done so already (see **Spring Lost in Winter,** p. 90), or they can head for the northern shoreline (see **The Isle of Apples,** p. 92).

DEBUGGING

Short of assaulting or killing Lancelot, the runners can do little wrong in this encounter. They make life very tough for themselves from here on in if they harm the old knight. And if they kill him, the adventure ends immediately. They will have failed completely, for Lancelot cannot now sacrifice himself. This adventure ends, and the runners move on to the next adventure, **The Impossible Dream**, p. 103.

SPRING LOST IN WINTER

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You follow the trail deeper into the woods. After a small rise, you enter a clearing. It appears roughly circular, perhaps 50 meters in diameter. At its center stands an equally circular hedge of thorns and brambles, about three meters high—just high enough to prevent anyone from seeing inside. As you approach the clearing, you can plainly smell freshly cut grass and feel a pleasing warmth begin to seep into your body.

HOOKS

See **At the Fountain,** p. 85, for information on the atmosphere of the woods.

BEHIND THE SCENES

At the end of the eastern trail through the woodlands stands a great wall of thorny brambles surrounded by an almost-circular clearing. The wall itself is circular and some three meters high. Warmth gently emanates from beyond the wall.

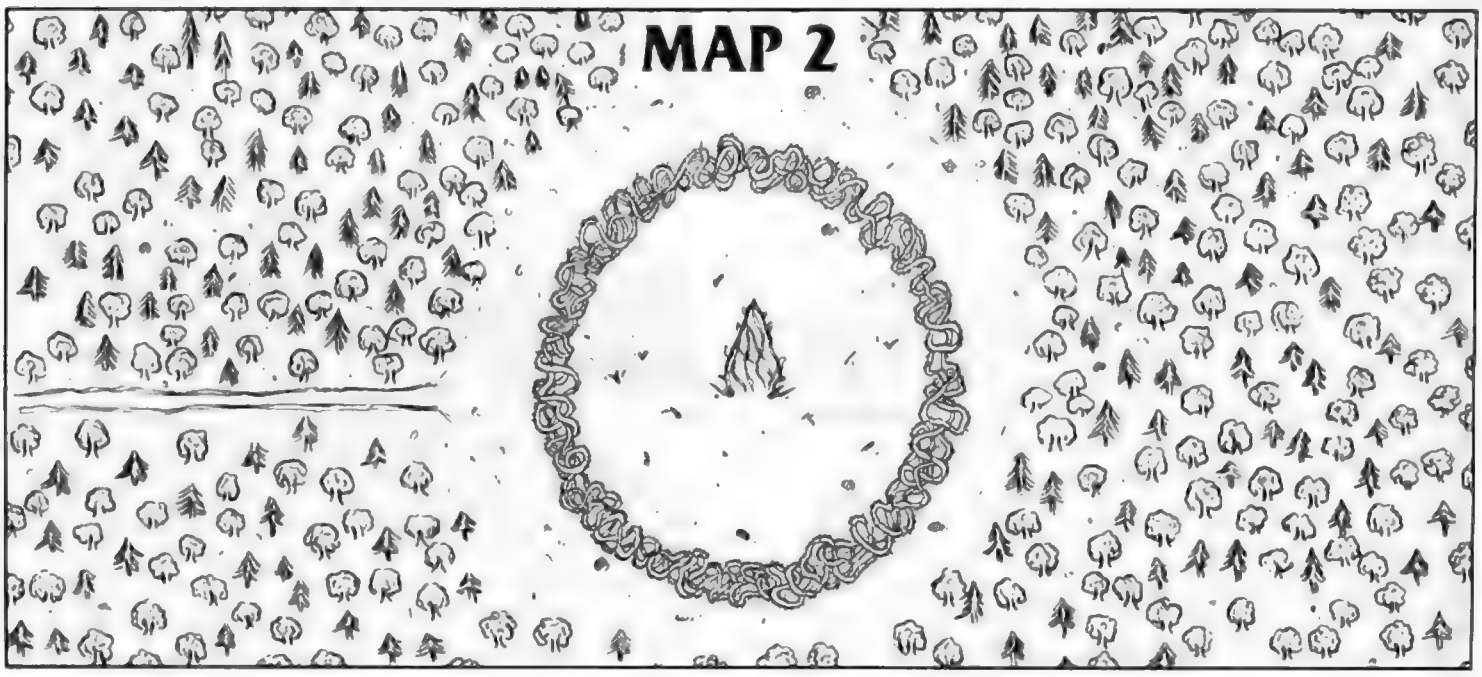
Fairly obvious strategies (a levitate person spell, or just having someone clamber onto the shoulders of a troll to peer over the wall) enable runners to see that the wall hides a strange plant—something that resembles a filigreed pea pod, roughly eight feet high and covered with intertwined tendrils of light green. The grass inside the thorn barrier, and the pod, are clearly fresh, green, and growing. The pod seems to contain a figure of some kind, perhaps a man or woman, but that is simply an impression—the runners cannot make out any details.

FREEING THE CAPTIVE

The players may believe they have found Merlin, if any of them recalls a version of his capture within a tree. However, the captive is Guinglainn, Gawaine's son, who lies dormant here awaiting his own freedom and the changes in this Place which will transform him into the new Spring Champion in his father's place. The runners must free him, though they should not expect this to be a straightforward operation.

The runners cannot bypass the thorn wall. Magical or technological flight, levitation, even tunneling is thwarted by an invisible spherical barrier that cannot be breached. The only way to get to Guinglainn is to cut through the wall, magically or physically.

Mana-based spells have no effect on the thorn wall. Otherwise, it takes Physical damage per standard rules. It has an effective Body Rating of 6. When damage to the wall reaches Deadly, the thorn wall is destroyed in the area of effect. If more than one assault (by weapon or spell) is needed to inflict a Deadly wound, the smallest area of effect of the various attacks is destroyed. This means that only area-effect weapons are of much use against the thorn barrier. Attacks using gas



weapons must include corrosive agents to have any effect. If the runners are carrying defoliants (!), the gamemaster must determine damage to the wall.

The thorn wall retaliates if attacked using an Initiative of 15 + 1Db. It sprays thorns for 20 meters in a 60-degree arc centered on the area of the wall that took damage. The thorns inflict 6M damage to targets 0–10 meters from the wall, and 6L damage to targets 11–20 meters away. Everyone in the area of effect is vulnerable, and the wall doesn't need a Success Test to hit targets. The attack stops only if the wall is wholly destroyed or when Guinglainn is freed. The wall does not fire thorns into the interior area around the pod.

The thorn wall also attacks by firing the hard nodules growing on its stems. These nodules are triggered when the wall is attacked, firing in a 60-degree arc at a range of 50 meters. The runners may avoid the nodules by making a successful Quickness (6) Test. Reduce the target number by 1 for each 2 levels of Athletics Skill above 5 a runner possesses. For each point of Magic Attribute a runner possesses above 5, reduce the target number by 1. A runner struck by a nodule is affected per a Force 6 fire dart spell.

Once the runners breach the wall and at least one reaches the pod, they still must free Guinglainn. This can be done simply by cutting at the stems with a knife, dagger, or similar implement. It takes 30 "runner turns" (like man-hours) to cut Guinglainn free. If a runner is using a knife/dagger weapon focus, the focus rating counts as the effective number of turns (e.g., one runner with a Rating 5 knife weapon focus would need only 6 turns to free Guinglainn). If simple physical strength is used to rip at the stems, a successful Strength (6) Test must be made for the action to count as an effective "runner turn." During their attempt to free Guinglainn, the runners are subject to magical beguiling—they hear siren voices telling them that they are sleepy, tired, weary, their eyes and limbs are heavy, and so on. A successful Willpower (5) Test must be made every turn to avoid this magical effect. Otherwise, the runner loses 1 point of Willpower per turn. If a runner's Willpower reaches zero, the runner falls asleep. Determine the duration of this sleep by subtracting the runner's Essence Rating from 10; the result is in hours, and all affected runners sleep for a minimum of 1 hour. Affected runners regain lost Willpower when they awaken.

THE CAPTIVE FREED

As soon as Guinglainn is freed, the wall stops attacking the runners. The young man wakes and looks around him, confused and uncertain. He does not know his name, where he is, or his own past. He says very little, but responds to those who treat him gently and politely with a warm, winning smile. The only thing he remembers is why he fell asleep. He says, "I was walking in the snow and I saw a raven lying wounded on the ground, blood around it. When I saw this, I fell into a trance. I know nothing else." Players probably will not recognize the colors represented—black (raven), white (snow) and red (blood)—as those of the Goddess who has protected him until the day comes for him to take his place as the Spring Champion.

Guinglainn joins the runners for the remainder of the adventure. **The Isle of Apples,** p. 92, and **Castle Maydenlande,** p. 96, produce strong reactions in the boy, which are described in those sections. From here, the runners can go to either of those encounters, back to the wise women (**At the Fountain,** p. 85), or to find Lancelot if they haven't already done so (**The Traitor Knight,** p. 88).

DEBUGGING

The Goddess' protection makes Guinglainn effectively invulnerable. Runners blowing the drek out of the thorn wall with assault cannons will not hurt him, though they do not know that, and so they should target area-effect weapons away from the pod.

If all the runners fall asleep trying to free Guinglainn, they awaken to find him free and doing his best to care for them. Sleeping runners must wake up on their own; they cannot be woken by any means.

The runners are not likely to attack Guinglainn, but if they do, he simply disappears before their eyes and reappears at the end of the adventure (see **The Lady of the Lake,** p. 102).

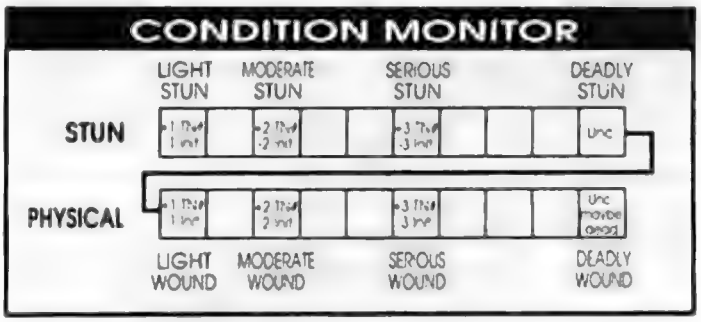
GUINGLAINN

The young Guinglainn stands 1.7 meters tall, of medium build, with wavy blond hair and blue eyes. His resemblance to Gawaine is striking and obvious to the runners if they have seen Gawaine already. Guinglainn is an amnesiac and recalls nothing beyond what is noted in the first encounter with him.

Guinglainn is both cursed and blessed by the Goddess. The Goddess has cursed him with simple-minded madness, but has provided him formidable protections as well. Guinglainn is effectively invulnerable to any magic or weaponry that would cause him any harm. Assensing reveals truly prodigious magical barriers placed upon his body. He is also unaffected by illusion spells. Until the end of the adventure, he simply tags along with the runners and doesn't speak much or fight.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
2	5	6*	5	5	4	6	5	0

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/1
Skills: Armed Combat 4 (Sword 8), Athletics 5, Etiquette (Court) 6, Leadership 2, Negotiation 4, Unarmed Combat 3
Gear: None
Notes: Guinglainn's Strength increases by 1 between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M., in a pale reflection of the way his father's prowess waxed and waned.



THE ISLE OF APPLES

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You had hoped for something different, but the shoreline here is as barren and cold as the woodland. You see no birds, but if you listen carefully you think you can hear their cries under the gentle rhythm of the light surf.

The shore is only a few dozen meters wide and strewn with rocks against which dull, murky water slowly laps. A mist on the water obscures everything beyond a few meters, but if you stare long enough you think you can make out the faint outlines of an island. ...

HOOKS

The overwhelming feeling of mystery and power remains with the runners. Once they have spotted the island, the feeling grows, especially for any female player characters. Men feel their attention focus on the island, but women receive the distinct impression that the island holds great promise.

BEHIND THE SCENES

From the barren northern shoreline, the runners can just discern the Isle of Apples, shrouded in mist across the water. They cannot reach the island by any means other than the barge sent to fetch them. This barge arrives at the first dusk after they begin to wait. Assensing reveals mighty magical barriers that absolutely prevent any other means of entry to the island.

At dusk, a small, flat-bottomed barge carrying a single robed and cowled figure drifts lazily toward the shoreline to pick up the runners. This event occurs only if the runners have already met Lancelot and freed Guinglainn; otherwise, the night passes without the barge's arrival. The figure wears black, relieved only by a red belt and a white scarf. As the boat reaches the shoreline, the figure says in a dispassionate female voice, "No man may set foot on the Isle of Apples and live" (skip this if the runners already heard this from the women at the fountain). The runners decide whether any or all of them board the barge. If they decide not to board the barge, it drifts away after a few minutes and never returns. Guinglainn will not enter the boat and cannot be compelled to do so.

HAZARDS OF THE JOURNEY

The robed figure does not speak after issuing her warning. If a runner pulls back the cowl of the figure's robe, he is in for a deathly surprise. The figure has no face. All the runner sees is utter darkness, with a maelstrom of stars where the eyes should be. The offender must make an Essence (10) Test; subtract 1 from the target number for each point of Magic Attribute above 5 the runner possesses, or above 2 if the runner is female (maximum reduction of 4). Runners who fail the test turn to glass instantly, topple and shatter into countless flying shards. No first aid or magic can save the runner. That's the end of this adventure for the unlucky victim. Regardless of which mortality option the gamemaster has chosen for all of **Harlequin's Back** (see p. 12), the affected runner should rejoin the group in **The Impossible Dream**, p. 103.

When the barge arrives at the disembarking point shown on Map 1 (see p. 85), any male who sets foot on the island is struck dead in the same manner. Males can safely stay in the boat, however. The barge remains at the shoreline until the runners express their desire to return to the mainland. Female characters who disembark experience the events presented in the rest of this chapter.

THE PRIESTESS OF AVALON

The Isle of Apples, also known as Avalon, is the realm of the Goddess and the burial site of Arthur. The island is less accessible to mortals than it once was, a fact which pains the Priestesses. Setting foot on the island is a thoroughly unsettling experience. A visitor first feels pain and deep sadness, followed by a sense of the strength and power of the island and its women, and a sense of yearning hope (perhaps a once *and future* king exists after all).

The island is not frozen and bleak like the mainland, but gives the impression of a land on the verge of spring. Viviane approaches the runners as soon as they set foot on the island. Behind her, copses of trees partially hide the wooden buildings that mark the settlement of the Priestesses. The runners will not be invited to the main settlement, and powerful nature spirits prevent any runners from infiltrating it. Only Viviane talks to the runners. She knows all that the runners have done and why they are here. She is willing to give them guidance, now that they have freed Guinglainn. Viviane speaks with female player characters only. Viviane considers men ephemeral in most senses, for enduring power and sovereignty reside in the hands of the Goddess alone. Still, Viviane knows that a Seasonal Champion is needed to restore the barren land beyond the island. And she has a keen sense of the tragedy of the fates of Arthur, Lancelot, and Gawaine, and grieves for them.

Viviane's helpfulness depends entirely on the intelligence and thoughtfulness of the questions runners ask her, as well as the level of compassion and concern the runners have displayed in their actions so far. Runners must show that they have reflected on what they have seen so far. Generic "can you help us O wise one?" questions get very short shrift.

The runners may ask Viviane questions about many subjects. See the **Overview**, p. 82, and **At the Fountain,** p. 85, for information on subjects not covered below. Viviane may also reveal the following information to the runners.

Guinglainn

Viviane confirms that Guinglainn's freedom is the key to lifting the barrenness that afflicts the land. She does not volunteer whose son he is, but tells the runners that the secret lies in Castle Maydenlande. If the runners ask her specifically if Guinglainn is Gawaine's son, then she admits this is so. If the runners ask about Gawaine and his status as the best Knight, review the material in the **Overview**, p. 82, and feed some of it to the runners. Viviane can reassure the runners that Guinglainn cannot be harmed and is in no danger. The

runners can do nothing about his amnesia. Indeed, if they tell Guinglainn that Viviane has said that he is Gawaine's son, he does not react to the news.

If any runner asks whether Guinglainn was cursed or afflicted by the Priestesses, Viviane says that he has been awaiting his time under the protection of the Goddess.

Lancelot

Runners must show compassion for the old knight when speaking of him and behave accordingly; Viviane knows what they have done. She will confirm both that he slew the best knight and Gawaine's identity as the victim. At the gamemaster's discretion, she may add that half of Lancelot belongs here, on the Isle of Apples, for his mother was a Priestess and Lancelot is half-fay. Viviane tells the runners not to return to him again, however. If the runners specifically ask whether Lancelot must atone for his treacheries in some way yet to be seen, Viviane looks greatly pleased with them. She says again that Castle Maydenlande must be searched for the answer, and she also gives the querying runner a handful (2D6 + 2) of hawthorn berries for healing. If swallowed, each of these berries reduces any Physical damage by 1 box. The berries can only be taken *after* a character has been wounded. They can be fed to an unconscious or dying runner.

Castle Maydenlande

If the runners ask what they must do in Castle Maydenlande, Viviane says that one of the male runners must give blood—just as the blood of the best knight was shed—and draw it using the same metal that struck down the best knight. This is an important piece of information, and the runners should definitely get this clue.

THE DREAM OF FLOWERS

Finally, Viviane may offer to allow the runners to take part in the Ritual of Flowers. Viviane says only that this is a ritual of the Priestesses that the runners may find enlightening. If the runners wish to decline, fine. Go to **Castle Maydenlande,** p. 96.

If the runners choose to take part in the ritual, they are taken to a clearing on the eastern edge of the settlement and given hot mulled wine and honeyed oatcakes rolled in finely grated almonds and caraway seed, and expected to sit quietly until the quarter moon rises to close to its zenith. The Priestesses of the island (some 40 in all) gather together and begin to sing softly. The runners immediately fall into a sleep-like trance and dream. Any male runner, even though he remains in the barge or on the far shore, may make an Essence (10) Test. Any successes mean that he, too, falls asleep and dreams. Reduce the target number by 2 if the male runner is in the barge on the island's shoreline or has a strong bond with any female runner who is dreaming.

The dream is intensely vivid, and the runner cannot be awakened until it ends. Female runners see a bow of white light form around the moon. The bow descends around them, covering them with red and white flowers girded with the blackness of the night sky. They stand alone on unknown, grassy terrain, and a giant humanoid figure wearing a great bronze breastplate and hefting a large club comes racing toward them. If the runner tries to flee in her dream, her feet do not move. The figure picks her up, throws her over his shoulder and races off toward a grim-looking castle in the distance. (Later, a successful Perception (8) Test will enable the runner to recognize that Castle Maydenlande and this castle look very similar.) Back in the dream, a successful Perception (6) Test enables the runner to see that a young man with golden hair is pursuing the giant, though he cannot keep up with the giant's gait. A second Perception (6) Test enables her to recognize this pursuer as Guinglainn. However, the dream Guinglainn is unlike the amnesiac half-child, half-man the runners have encountered. This Guinglainn is strong and determined and he runs in a fury at the giant. Finally, a moment of paradoxical intuition occurs. The female runner knows she is helpless to resist the giant but also knows that the young man can only come after her because of her own power. Her strength and resistance empower him. The giant is an abductor only because he has been chosen for this role. The runner feels a surge of confidence and strength; this makes life easier in Castle Maydenlande. The dream ends.

Male runners who dream see the same terrain and the same abduction scene, but the woman appears to them as one of the Priestesses (most likely Belisent). They see themselves—not Guinglainn—give chase and see the giant racing toward the castle. The final feeling is one of fear and self-doubt as the giant disappears faster than they can pursue. The dream ends.

Both male and female runners who dream see themselves as alone in these visions (i.e., no other runner is with them). From here, the runners should go to **Castle Maydenlande,** p. 96.

JANE FOSTER ALONE

If the runners' group contains no female characters, Jane Foster enters the Isle of Apples alone. Events proceed for her as outlined above, including the dream. The gamemaster decides what questions Frosty asked of the Priestess, and what she tells the runners when she returns (though she has no reason to keep anything from them).

DEBUGGING

Too bad if the males get geeked. They were warned. *All* of them getting geeked is a problem, however, because it will be impossible to complete the adventure. Hopefully, if one steps off the barge and keels over dead, the others should have the sense not to follow suit. If they all do anyway, suggest that the players find more intelligent approaches to problem solving in the future.

Apart from such madness as attacking Viviane, the runners can do little to derail this encounter. Speaking with Viviane and participating in the dream provides the runners extra help, information, and advantages in Castle Maydenlande. But a group of runners that never sets foot on Avalon can still complete the adventure successfully.

If appropriate, proceed to **Castle Maydenlande**, p. 96.

VIVIANE

Viviane is a woman in her middle years, 1.8 meters tall and of medium build, with thick, wavy brown hair and green eyes. She is dressed in a simple brown robe with a neck scarf of black, red, and white. A green belt girds her waist. Viviane has a special quality of beauty that cannot be reduced to simple, definable physical characteristics. She doesn't have legs up to her neck, cheekbones you could plane wood with, or any other readily identifiable feature currently defined as desirable. Rather, she has a powerful and wondrous female physical presence. Her beauty is felt more than seen.

If anything—and this is only noticeable to a runner who specifically looks for such a resemblance, and makes a successful Perception (8) Test—Viviane most resembles Jane Foster, though this has no impact on any level on the events of this adventure.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	6	2	10	8	6	8	40	7

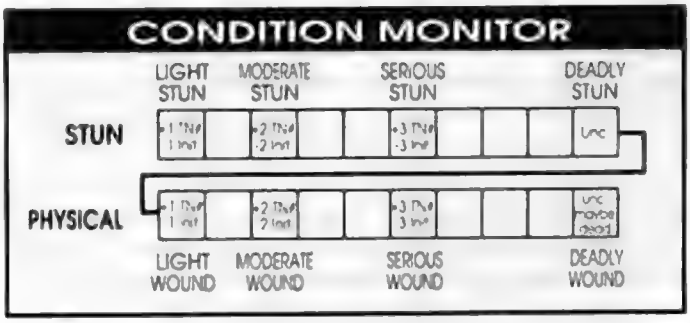
Initiative: 7 + 1D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 15/4

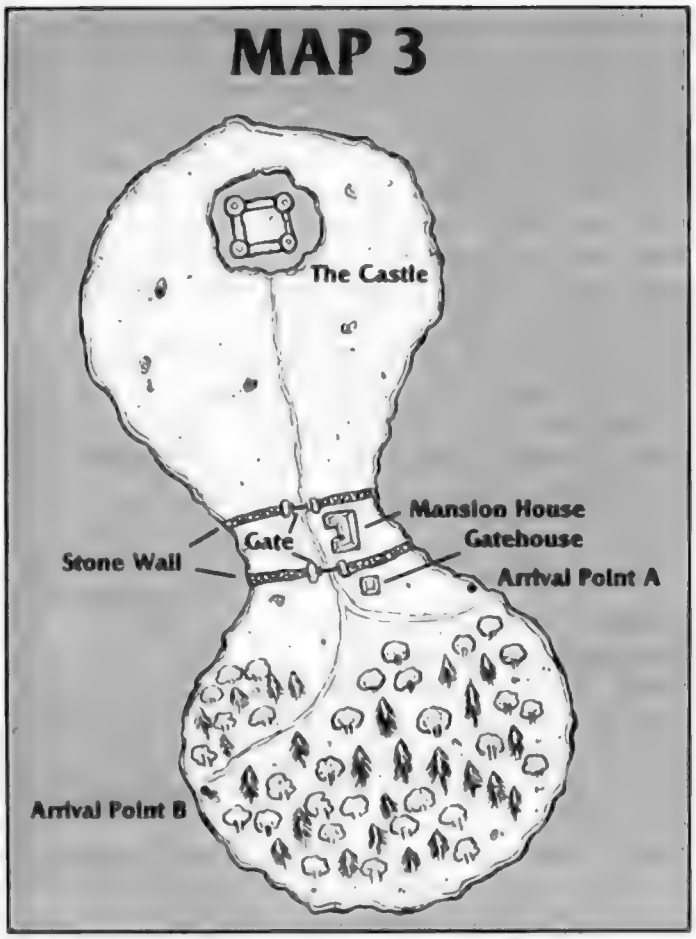
Skills: Armed Combat 4 (Dagger 10), Conjuring 40, Enchantment 40, Interrogation 7, Leadership 10, Magical Theory 40, Negotiation 8, Psychology 10, Sorcery 10

Gear: Power Focus (8), Spell Lock: Mask (40), Weapon Focus (Knife) (8)

Notes: Viviane knows all spells in versions with Force Ratings of 1 through 15. On the Isle of Apples, she gains bonus dice equal to her current Essence Rating for all Spellcasting and Resistance Tests. Her Leadership Skill Rating is doubled when dealing with any other Priestess.



CASTLE MAYDENLANDE



BEHIND THE SCENES

The island of Castle Maydenlande is shrouded in mist, which obscures the island's outline to distant observers. Impenetrable magical barriers around the island prevent any form of access other than the ferry sent for the runners. The ferry comes only if the runners have already found both Lancelot and Guinglainn, and it arrives at the first dusk after the runners begin waiting on the shoreline opposite the island. The small ferryboat, similar in shape to a rowing boat, drifts ashore at dusk. A gnarled, aged ferryman in a plain brown robe is the vessel's sole occupant. He does not speak or respond to the runners. If the runners have the gift of Belisent's girdle, they disembark at Point A shown on Map 3, above; if not, they disembark at Point B. The island is as barren and frozen as the mainland. Travel across the island is normal, but the runners cannot leave the land (e.g., by swimming); the barrier around the island is at shoreline level. The ferry waits at the shore until the runners have found Gawaine within the castle.

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

If the players disembark at Point B, two giant figures emerge from the woodland around the shoreline and savagely attack the runners. These creatures are fomorians and appear to be half-giant, half-troll. They fight to the death and cannot be forced to flee combat by any means, magical or otherwise.

Fomorians (2)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
10/3	4 x 2	11	1	3	4	5	4	9D, +1 Reach

Initiative: 4 + 1D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4

Powers: Corrosive Secretions, Enhanced Physical Attributes (Strength, 3 times/day, increased by [Essence + 2] for [Essence]D6 turns), Enhanced Senses (Thermographic Vision), Magical Resistance

Weaknesses: Allergy (Air Pollution, Severe), Allergy (Sunlight, Nuisance)

THE BEHEADING GAME

To reach Castle Maydenlande, the runners must pass through a barred wooden gate bearing a great iron chain and padlock, located in the middle of the island. The runners can open this gate only with the keys hanging from the belt of the knight who guards the gate. The knight is clad in chain mail, his face hidden by a great helm and visor, and he greets them with a challenge. The knight, named Bercilak, will not permit them to pass unless they play a game with him. The game is an exchange of blows. One runner must take the axe Bercilak holds and use it to strike a blow at the knight's neck. On the morning of the day after tomorrow, the knight will return the blow against the one who struck him. Bercilak does not reveal his name or discuss the game. The runners can either attack and overcome him, or agree to play the game. If they attack Bercilak, resolve the combat per standard rules. If the runners agree to the game, Bercilak will give his axe to a male runner. How the runners conduct themselves at this point is crucial.

Bercilak kneels as if awaiting a beheading. If the runner strikes firmly at his head, the knight is automatically beheaded. Bercilak's headless body then picks up his head, replaces it on his shoulders, and invites the runners into his home, the man-

sion standing in front of Castle Maydenlande. He appears very pleased, but he reminds the runners of their agreement for the game and promises to return the runner's blow at dawn of the day after next. He takes the keys from his belt, opens the gate for the runners, and directs them to the mansion. He enters the small gatehouse himself and locks the door behind him. No layout of the gatehouse is provided on the map. If the runners enter it (the doors are locked), Bercilak will be gone even though they did not see him leave.

If the runner deliberately tries to miss when he strikes at Bercilak, the knight becomes angry and reminds the runner of the rules of the game: a blow must be struck. If the runner then deliberately strikes weakly or at an angle so as to deliver a glancing blow, the knight becomes enraged and grabs the axe to assault the runners. They have failed the test of the Beheading Game, and must fight Bercilak and take his keys before they can approach the mansion.

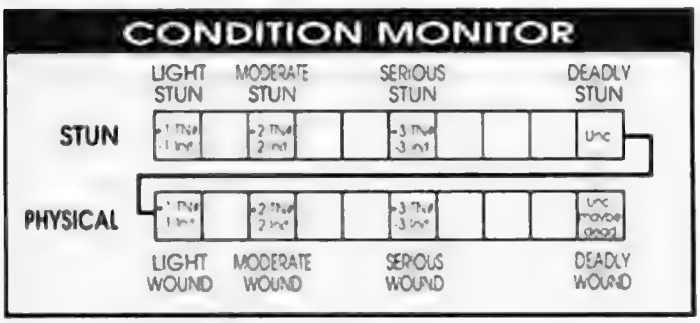
Bercilak

Bercilak stands a little over 2 meters tall. He is powerfully built and in his mid-40s. His black hair and thick black beard are streaked with gray. His eyes are gray, and his demeanor is polite but reticent. He is clearly a powerful knight—impress this fact on the runners. His axe is specifically crafted for him, and if anyone else wields it in combat (as opposed to using it in the Beheading Game) they suffer an increase of 2 to the target numbers for all tests. Bercilak represents the Winter Champion, infertile and part of the barrenness of the land. If the runners succeed in the Beheading Game, they reduce the extent of their own sacrifice required in Castle Maydenlande.

Bercilak is not a manifestation of the Enemy in this Place, though the runners may assume that he is, based on his appearance.

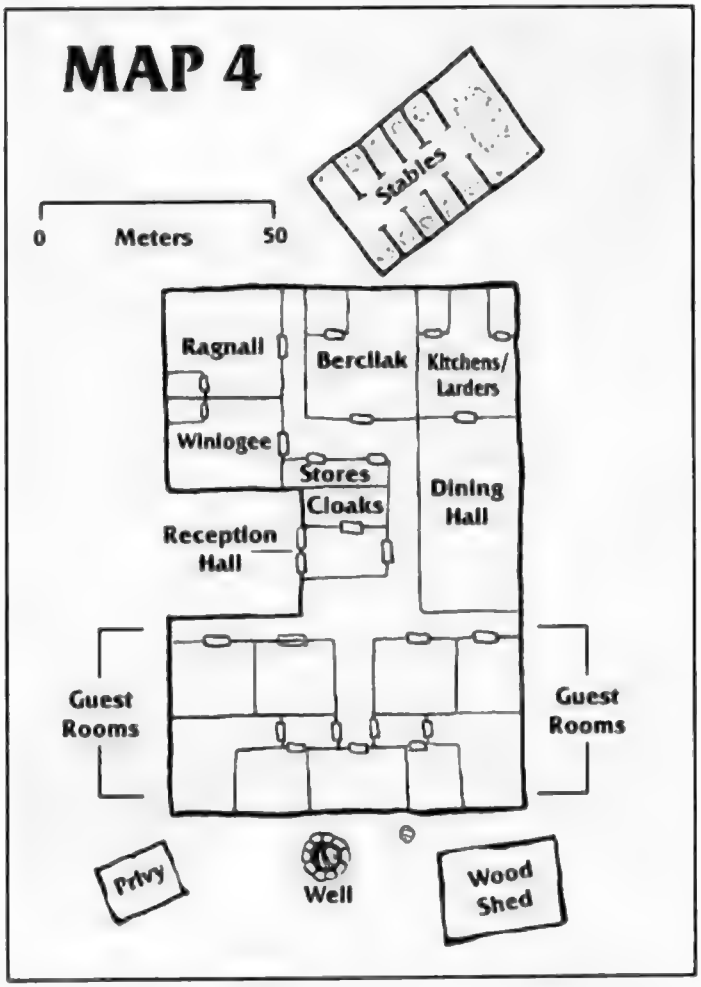
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
7	6	7	3	4	6	6	5	4/6

Initiative: 5 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Skills: Armed Combat 10 (Axe 12), Athletics 5, Etiquette 6, Leadership 4, Unarmed Combat 7
Gear: Chain Mail Armor (4/6), Weapon Focus (Axe) (4)



THE MANSION

The runners can proceed only to the mansion after their encounter with Bercilak. If they have slain Bercilak, they find the mansion deserted and the gate to Castle Maydenlande,



north of the mansion, open. Go to **Into the Castle**, p. 99. Otherwise, Bercilak greets them at the mansion's door. The knight no longer wears his armor nor holds his fearsome axe. Instead, he carries only a simple blackthorn stick and wears a coarse black robe. Of course, the runners may not realize the robed man is the knight who challenged them to the Beheading Game; the only clues to his identity are his height and his voice. Make a Perception (6) Test to determine whether the runners recognize Bercilak's identity; reduce the target number by 1 if any runner has acute hearing. If the runners ask Bercilak directly whether he was the guardian of the first gate, he smiles enigmatically and refuses either to confirm or deny this. He invites the runners to be his dinner guests in the great hall of the mansion.

If the runners refuse, Bercilak takes offense and demands to know why they have refused his hospitality. If they continue to refuse, Bercilak takes his axe from just inside the doorway and attacks them, fighting until the runners kill him. The runners then find the mansion house empty and the gate to Castle Maydenlande open. Bercilak does not return to play the second half of the Beheading Game, and the runners fail that test.

Some players may know that, in some legends, eating food from an otherworldly place—and the presence of the women and Bercilak's symbolic role suggest this is indeed such a place—is unwise. If a player character specifically asks about this, allow him or her to feign an upset stomach; Bercilak

takes no offense. In fact, the food here is fine. Note that Bercilak does not allow any trolls into the mansion. They can stay in the gatehouse, which is quiet and comfortable, but no luxury dinners here, chummers.

If the runners accept Bercilak's invitation, he serves them a splendid meal. Pies, sweetmeats, venison, partridge, pheasant, fruits, fine wines, and mead are piled high on their host's table. At dinner, he introduces them to the women of the household—Ragnall and Winlogee, Bercilak's wife and daughter. Both are surpassingly beautiful women and look more like sisters than mother and daughter. Both have honey-blond hair, green eyes, and fine, pale skin. They wear fine dresses of different colors. Ragnall wears green edged with yellow and has a yellow lace belt around her midriff; Winlogee wears pale blue trimmed with cream lace and a white lace choker around her neck. If game stats are needed for either woman, use those provided for Viviane, p. 95.

Bercilak, Ragnall, and Winlogee tactfully and politely decline to answer questions. They present themselves simply as residents of the mansion at the gateway to Castle Maydenlande, and claim to know little or nothing of events in the castle or on the mainland. They know the sovereign of the castle on the hill only as "a worthy knight and gentleman." Even Bercilak claims not to know the sovereign's identity, saying that he only deals with heralds and emissaries, though even they have long gone and the castle appears deserted now. They feign having heard of Arthur, Lancelot, Gawaine, and the like as legends only. They are much more interested in discussing the runners and their lives and regard their quest as a romantic, intriguing adventure that they wish they could help with but cannot.

However, if the runners ask how to get into Castle Maydenlande, Bercilak says that he alone can grant them access and agrees to do so the day after tomorrow. In the interim, he is happy to entertain them as valued and honored guests.

During this meal, Winlogee makes eyes at the male runner wearing Belisent's girdle. Make her romantic interest in the runner obvious. If no runner wears Belisent's girdle, she focuses her attention on the male runner with the highest Charisma. However, a successful test using an average of the runner's Perception and Essence ratings against a Target Number of 6 enables the male runner concerned to recognize that Winlogee is ambivalent and feels inner conflict about her attraction.

After the meal, the runners feel agreeably warm, comfortable, tired from their exertions, and probably slightly drunk. The mead was *strong* and so was the wine. If the group includes any determined teetotalers, Bercilak makes at least four toasts to them, which they cannot politely decline. Bercilak shows the runners to the guest bedrooms. He has prepared one room for each team member, but they may decide to hole up together for the night. No matter. Whatever their intentions, they peacefully fall asleep.

THE TEST OF VIRTUE

In the middle of the night, a male runner is awakened by Ragnall to find himself alone on a luxurious four-poster bed (select the highest-Charisma male after the one selected by Winlogee). Ragnall is dressed provocatively and makes obviously seductive gestures to the runner.

If the runner accepts her invitation, he fails the test of virtue, for Ragnall is Bercilak's wife and no truly chivalrous male would accept her advances. If he wishes to resist, have the player decide what his character is going to say and do. What he should do, of course, is to praise the beauty and obvious delights of Ragnall and decline what would be bliss beyond normal mortal hopes because of her married status. In return, Ragnall says that her husband is impotent, and makes even more determined advances to the runner. To resist these advances, a runner must make a successful Willpower (6) Test. A smart player whose character fails this test will use Karma to get another shot. If he fails the second Willpower Test, he fails the test of virtue as well. If he succeeds, Ragnall reluctantly praises his scruples and withdraws, but not before giving him the lace belt at her waist as a keepsake. Then the runner falls peacefully back to sleep.

THE RIDDLE GAME

The following morning, the runners receive breakfast in the great hall just before dawn. This meal is as magnificent as the dinner served the previous night, but only Bercilak is here; the womenfolk are not present. Bercilak announces his intention of hunting boar in the eastern forest during the day and invites any male runners to accompany him. If any of them decide so to do, great. Stick 'em on horseback with chain-mail vests and lances and set a bunch of crazed and powerful boars on them. Have fun. If the male that Winlogee made eyes at the previous night decides to go, have her appear at the end of the meal and persuade him otherwise. If he still decides to go, too bad.

During the daytime, only one possible event is of importance. The runners can run around the mansion house or forest all they like; the gamemaster should devise suitable encounters (especially in the forests) to occupy the runners' time. However, the runner to whom Winlogee is attracted should, at some stage, be alone in the castle so that she can approach him. If this is impossible, the Riddle Game simply does not take place.

If Winlogee's chosen runner can be found alone at some time, this encounter needs careful staging. It must take place in a darkened area, but because the rooms of the mansion house are decorated with very heavy curtains, this is easily arranged. Winlogee comes to her man wearing a lace veil, and seduces him. Love and lust fill the runner, and he acquiesces readily.

When these two have enjoyed each other, Winlogee rises and throws back the veil. Her face is that of an aged hag, though her body remains that of a young woman. She says to the runner that he is hers, and she is his. She then explains that she is subject to a cruel enchantment. Winlogee can be beautiful by night (as she was at dinner last night, and after breakfast—at dawn—if she appeared then) and a hag by day if this is what the man wishes: a beautiful lover at night and someone to be shunned by day. Or, she can be ugly at night and beautiful by day. She asks the runner how she should choose.

The answer to this riddle is simple: the runner must say that the choice should be hers. He will accept *her* decision. If the runner makes this reply, Winlogee cries for joy and gives the runner her lace choker. The enchantment upon her is lifted and she will always be young and beautiful, by night *and* by day. The runner has succeeded in the Riddle Game. Any other reply means the runner has failed, and Winlogee leaves. If the runner succeeds, give the two of them a carnal reprise. It should be time for dinner when they finish.

COMETH THE DAWN

Dinner passes just as it did the preceding evening. Whatever the runners' intentions, they fall asleep almost immediately afterward. In the morning, the runners wake to an empty household. Before them stands the closed gate to Castle Maydenlande, identical to the gate that blocked access to the mansion.

Bercilak stands, attired in chain mail and hefting his axe, demanding that the runner who agreed to play his game accept his blow. Again, the runners can attack Bercilak if they wish; conduct combat per standard rules. Otherwise, the runner who beheaded him must kneel to accept his blow. Bercilak strikes downward with his axe. The gamemasters should ask the runner what he's doing, and really apply the pressure. "If you flinch away, you might get lucky. It might be a glancing blow. Otherwise your fraggin' head's coming off. Do you think you can just put it back on like he did?" Try your best to get the runner to flinch. If he does, Bercilak stops his blow short and chides the runner for cowardice. Repeat this for a second and third strike if necessary. If the runner flinches a third time, Bercilak bellows with rage and attacks the runners. Conduct a combat per standard rules.

If the runner hangs tight and waits to be beheaded, Bercilak's blow passes through his neck, like the wind through wheat, without harming him. The axe vanishes. Bercilak throws off his visor and helm and the runners see a rejuvenated, youthful man. His beard no longer contains streaks of gray. He yells for joy, disappears before the runners' eyes, and the gate to Castle Maydenlande flings open. The runners can pass onward. They have succeeded in the Beheading Game.

THE CASTLE MOAT

Two each-uisges (water horses) lurk in the stagnant, foul waters of the castle moat. They are torpid and may not attack the runners. If the runners enter the water, try to conjure an elemental from it, or otherwise disturb the moat, the creatures attack. Otherwise, make an Essence (6) Test for the water horses. Only if the test succeeds do they attack. Add 1 to the target number for each of the gifts the runners may have received: girdle, belt, and choker.

Each-Uisges (2)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
10/1	4 x 6	8	—	2/4	3	6	4	6S, +1 Reach

Initiative: 4 + 3D6

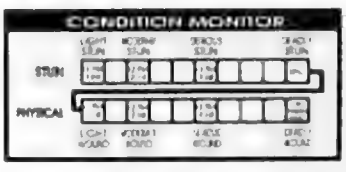
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4

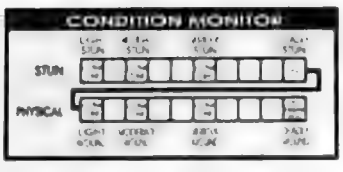
Powers: Compulsion (LOS), Engulf, Enhanced Movement, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Sonar)

Weaknesses: Allergy (Air Pollution, Severe), Allergy (Sunlight, Nuisance)

Notes: The each-uisge's skin secretes a highly adhesive coating. Any victim touching an each-uisge must make a successful Strength (6) Test to free the affected body part(s) or weapon from the creature's skin. Quickness multiplier for swimming is 5. This critter usually sticks to its victim, then drags its meal into the water to drown him.

INTO THE CASTLE





The castle lies largely in ruins. The outbuildings are just piles of rubble. The upper story of the once-fine keep is in total disrepair, and so only the ground-level floor of the keep is mapped here. Increase all target numbers for events within the

castle by 5—encounters here are desperately dangerous. However, apply the following reductions to target numbers. All are cumulative per individual.

–2 for a runner wearing Belisent's girdle
–2 for a runner wearing Ragnall's belt
–2 for a runner wearing Winlogee's choker
–2 if the runners succeeded in the Beheading Game
–3 for a female runner
–2 for a runner who experienced the dream of the abduction of the Flower Maiden

The script assumes that the runners approach the castle's main gate, which they can push open easily. However, they may try another approach. The slit windows of the castle are too narrow for runners to squeeze through, but they might try blowing a hole in a wall with a missile or spell. If they do, the castle takes no damage, and a pair of Rating 8 earth elementals animate from the surrounding ground and attack them.

EMPTY CASTLE AREAS

If the runners explore the castle's armory, the guardrooms, and guest rooms, improvise details. The guest rooms all have one notable feature: they all contain wardrobes filled with old, faded ball gowns, dresses, and other women's garments, and their decor IS clearly feminine. The decor in other rooms can be improvised, but everything is dusty, faded, and silent within Castle Maydenlande. The castle is also pitch dark, though unlit wooden torches can be found along the walls.

THE SENTINELS

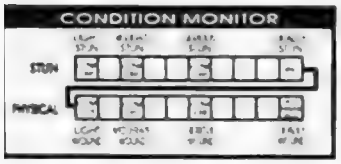
As the runners approach the Great Hall, they see a pair of stone statues of knights holding swords in their hands in the corridor before them. The statues stand perfectly still until a runner approaches within a meter of them or until the runners attack them in some way. Then the statues animate and fight ferociously. Damage less than Deadly wounds does not affect them, nor do mana-based spells. Edged weapons (knives, daggers, katana, swords, and the like) have no effect on these statues unless they are magical weapons.

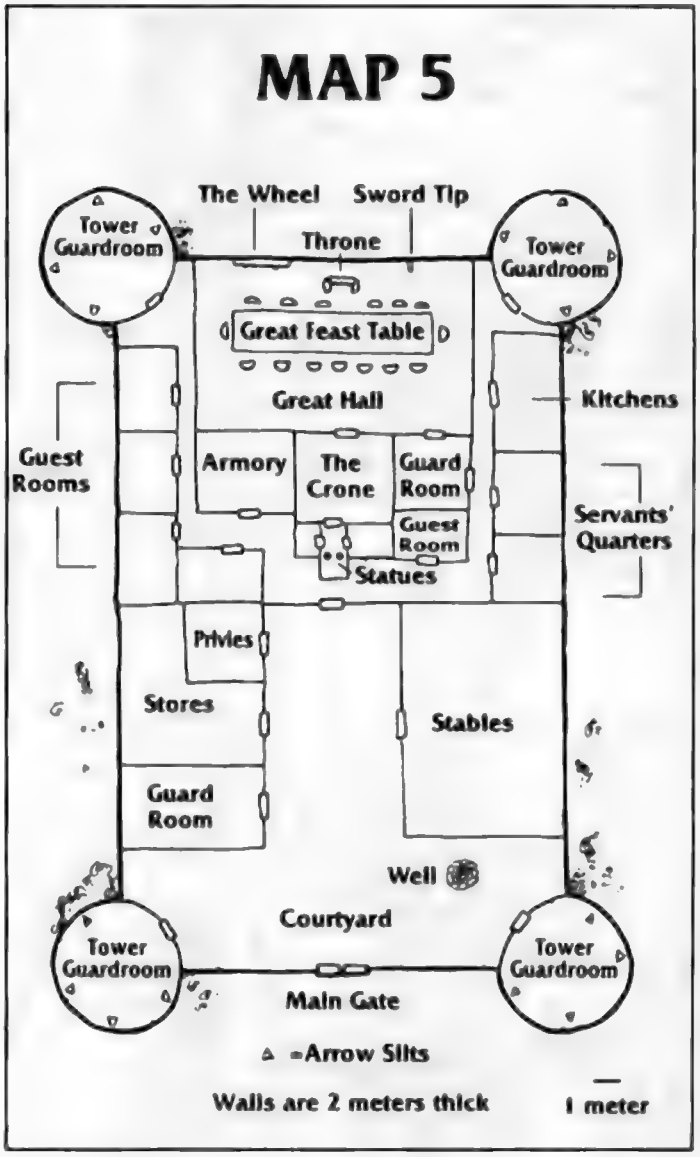
Stone Knights (2)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
6	3	7	—	—	4	—	4	8S

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat Rating: 5
Skills: Armed Combat 8
Notes: The stone knights have a Barrier Rating of 7. Runners must achieve a Deadly wound against a stone knight to destroy it.

THE CRONE





Guarding access to the great hall is an old woman, a manifestation of the Goddess in her destructive aspect. She is dressed entirely in black and has white hair and green eyes. The woman is ugly, stooped, and hard of face. Dusty furniture and old, filthy drapes and carpets clutter her chamber. The crone guards Gawaine against any who enter and lack sufficient skill and power to overcome her. The crone is immune to any spells that affect perception or volition (e.g., illusion spells and controlling manipulation spells). However, the crone does not attack the runners immediately. First, she demands to know their reason for entering the castle. How well the runners reply to this question determines how severely she tries them in the inevitable combat to follow. The runners should make three key points in their reply (give them no more than a couple of minutes to state their case). First, they must say they are here to free Gawaine, or Guinglainn, or at least to lift the curse of the land's barrenness. Second, they must indicate they are acting in accordance with the wishes of the Priestesses, or that they serve the will of the women of the land. Third, they must say they are here to offer a sacrifice of their own (they can only have learned this from Viviane). The crone does not discuss

anything they say, save for the last point. She tells them they must give blood into the cup they will find before them and looks to the door to the great hall. Then the crone states ominously that whoever seeks the glory of freeing the land must show skill and endeavor, and she attacks the runners with spells. For each of the three aforementioned points the runners have successfully stated, reduce the Force Ratings of her spells by one.

Crone

B	Q	S	C	I	W	M	E	R	Attacks
4	7	3	6	6	6	12	6	9	By weapon

Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Gear: Weapon Focus (Knife) (5)
Spells:

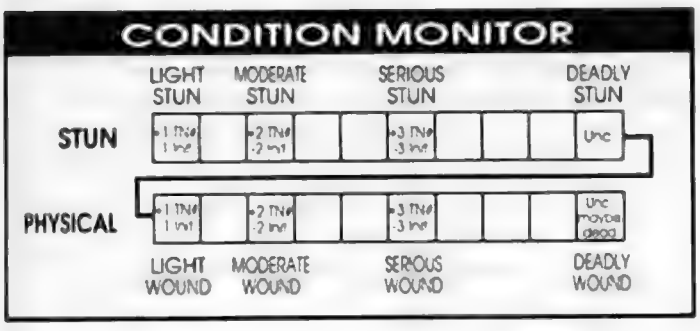
Combat: Death Touch, Power Bolt, Slay Elf, Slay Human, Slay Troll, Stun Touch

Illusion: Chaotic World, Invisibility, Stink

Health: Decrease Attribute (1,2,3,4), Decrease Cybered Attribute (1,2,3,4), Decrease Reflexes (1,2,3)

Manipulation: Acid, Acid Stream, Bullet Barrier, Control Emotion, Control Thoughts, Flame Burst, Ice Sheet

Notes: The crone has Sorcery Skill and Conjuring Skill of 12. She uses spells at a base Rating of 8 (subject to modifiers above). She does not conjure/summon spirits or elementals, but attempts to dispel any conjured against her. She does not attack any female runner who has experienced the Dream of the Flowers, but she may use control spells to take such a runner out of the fray. She does not attack Guinglainn, and he will not attack her. She has magical protections that confer the equivalent of 4/4 armor and give her 2 additional automatic successes in any Resistance Test against magical effects, though she must achieve at least one success herself on such tests. Lastly, the crone's weapon focus loses its magic if taken from this Place and is of no use to the runners.



MEETING GAWAINE

The Great Hall is empty and silent as a tomb. The huge table is set for a fine banquet, but cobwebs and dust hang over the silverware, the fine tureens, the fine silver and gold platters. The very center of the table holds four items not covered in dust: a golden platter, a slim silver rod, a sinuous ivory-handled silver knife (almost long enough to be a short sword, though it has a slim blade), and—much larger than these others—a great silvered pewter cauldron. To the right of the huge wooden throne, a metal bracket on the wall holds the broken-off tip of a sword, which clearly is the lost fragment of Lancelot's sword. Droplets of blood trickle down the stone wall from the tip. To the left of the throne, a large stained-glass decoration is set into the stone wall and glows with a dim light. The circular decoration has a center design showing a white rose on a background of red petals. A concentric circle of glass bearing Latin inscriptions surrounds the rose design. The outer area of the circle is evenly divided into 24 segments, alternately white and red, and a final outer circle also bears Latin inscriptions. If any of the runners read Latin, the inner script reads, "May the earth open and swallow me, may the sky fall upon me, may the sea rise and cover me, may fire consume me, I am forsworn" (a powerful binding oath). The outer inscription reads, "I praise the one who, to keep guard over me, did bestow my seven senses, from fire and water, earth and air: one is for instinct, two is for feeling, three is for speaking, four is for tasting, five is for seeing, six is for hearing, seven is for smelling." A runner able to decipher this inscription may make a Magical Theory (8) Test to recognize that they come from the fabled *Books of Broceliande*, the writings of Taliesin.

Next, the runners must make their own sacrifice here, foreshadowing Lancelot's. A male runner must take the sword tip and use it to cut himself and let some blood run into the silver cauldron on the table. The runner must inflict a Moderate wound on himself, unless the runner is the one who succeeded personally in the Beheading Game. In this case, a Light wound will do. This sacrifice is the only way to bring Gawaine's spirit into the hall. At that point, Guinglainn is no longer with the runners, if they brought him here. He has simply disappeared.

If the runners make the sacrifice, Gawaine appears in spectral form, hovering within the stained-glass decoration. He is strikingly handsome, some 45 years of age, with wavy blond hair, blue eyes, and a ready smile. A wound from a sword thrust is clearly visible on his right hip. His resemblance to Guinglainn is obvious. He looks approvingly at the runner who has made the blood sacrifice and tells him that another sacrifice is now needed to free the land from its barrenness. Only by that sacrifice can the broken blade be formed anew. He commands the runners to find Lancelot and take him to the Lady of the Lake. Gawaine does not converse much, though he is unfailingly polite, especially to female runners. Gawaine then disappears. Go to **The Lady of the Lake**, p. 102.

DEBUGGING

The only major glitch here occurs if the crone of Castle Maydenlande defeats the runners. If this happens, any runners disabled or rendered unconscious during the combat wake to find that she has gone. They can proceed into the Great Hall and make their sacrifice, but Gawaine clearly finds them barely worthy. They can go on to the next encounter, but the taint of failure hangs over them.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE

BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners can return to the mainland by ferry to find Lancelot. When they show him the broken tip of the sword with which he slew Gawaine, he laments and falls into weeping. The old knight appears utterly broken, a painful and wretched sight for the runners. After a few moments he stands stiffly upright, as if summoning all his remaining strength. He takes both parts of the broken sword and walks away toward the lake. The runners should simply follow him. If the runners come to the lake before this climax, absolutely nothing happens.

AT THE LAKESIDE

A solitary figure waits by the lakeshore as Lancelot and the runners approach. The figure is Guinglainn, but the young man now appears very different. He knows himself as Gawaine's son and the next Champion of Spring, and he looks older, wiser, strong, and purposeful. Even his gait communicates this. Lancelot looks at him as if acknowledging an old friend. Guinglainn says simply, "The blade is still broken," and the old knight nods agreement. Lancelot gazes out over the water and cries out, "*Arthur!*"

What comes to Lancelot is not his dead king, but his king's greatest possession—Excalibur. From the waters emerges Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, bearing the treasured sword in her hands. Nimue is a Priestess, but she has an elfin beauty. Pearls and fine-fronded, flowering lake plants gird her body. Magician runners do not even need to make a test to know that this sword *screams* with magical power. Lancelot strides forward, but it is Guinglainn who takes Excalibur, and Lancelot nods as if acknowledging the young man's claim to the sword; Guinglainn says "blood must be atoned." Then the youth hands the sword to Lancelot. The old knight kneels, drives the blade through his chest and slumps to the ground. Make this a dreadfully shocking, unexpected moment. Lancelot's blood seeps down the lakeside into the waters. At his last breath, a sigh of pain and release escapes his lips.

Viviane appears at this point, with half a dozen Priestesses bearing a bier. Fondly, gently, she turns over the old knight's body and holds his face in her hands, kissing his forehead as she weeps over him. She pulls the bloodied Excalibur from his body and gives it to Guinglainn. A runner standing close enough may hear her whisper, "Lancelot, did you find peace at last?"

The body is placed on the bier to be taken to Avalon. If a female runner asks very politely if he belongs there, Viviane says that Lancelot's mother was of Avalon, and he is coming back to his true home after so many years in his wilderness of suffering. Viviane answers such a query only if it comes from a female runner.

Guinglainn takes the broken blade from the runners and grips the area of the break in his hands. When he removes his hands a moment later, the blade is whole and he gives the sword (which has no special abilities) to the runners. Their work is done. *Finis.* They carry two final images of this Place as they leave: Lancelot's body on the bier, with his face showing peace at last, and the young King/Champion, Arthur's grandnephew, standing stern and strong and proud. By his feet, a tiny flowering plant extends its petals to the rays of the warming sun and he reaches down toward it. ...

The Place changes, and the runners are adrift again in the metaplanes.

DEBUGGING

The runners are only spectators at this scene. They should do nothing to alter the fateful events here. If they plan to do so, drop extremely heavy hints to them that they have already done enough to return the fate of this Place to the powers that should hold sway over it.

Continue with **The Impossible Dream**, the next adventure.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"
—Mark 8:36

OVERVIEW

This part of the astral quest takes place in a bizarre, mythic, archetypal realm. The plot involves a peaceful Village corrupted by an outsider called the Foreman who tricked the villagers into believing they could only find Utopia in the heavens. Convinced that everything they ever wanted awaited them in the sky, the villagers abandoned their homes to construct a monstrous Tower. Eventually, everyone except a disillusioned man known as the Architect climbed up into the Tower, leaving the Village in ruins.

Outsiders can see clearly that the Foreman has virtually enslaved the villagers by tricking them into attempting the impossible. The only person able to convince the villagers to return to their homes is a virtuous Maiden beloved by all, but she lies captive in the Foreman's bunker at the Tower's summit.

In this adventure, the runners must explore the remains of the Village, figure out what is going on, climb the Tower, confront the Foreman, and free the Maiden. As their reward, they may ask the Architect to construct the Songbird's cage from Lancelot's sword. As the avatar of Darke in this Place, the Foreman is a dangerous adversary with many minions and guardians at his disposal, and so the runners will find this portion of the quest a worthy challenge.

INTO THE BREACH

On this metaplane, the player characters all wear gray robes and carry none of their equipment or weapons. Enhanced characters still possess the abilities granted by their cyberware, but the tech looks like flesh and blood. The only tech that does not work is datasofts that provide information. The runners can acquire all the equipment they will need to complete the adventure along the way.

MAGIC ON THE MYTHIC PLANE

Most magic functions normally on this metaplane, except for conjuring. The spirits of this place are different from those with whom the player characters usually deal, and so the gamemaster should use the following information whenever a player character attempts to summon a spirit.

Elementals have the normal statistics and powers described in the **Shadowrun** rules, but differ in appearance and personality from their "real-world" counterparts. These spirits do not have the same tendencies toward subservience that normal elementals show; if not treated with respect, they simply disappear. If insulted or threatened, such a spirit may even turn on its "master." Characters do not need a conjuring library to summon spirits here.

Though unusually willful, all these spirits fear the Architect's sword, an artifact the player characters will probably acquire during the adventure. Though the sword's presence does not drive them off, they will shy away from the weapon and its wielder. If asked why, they cannot give an answer and will act frustrated by their discomfort and confusion.

The appearance and general behavior of this metaplane's elemental spirits are described below.

Air Elemental

An air elemental appears as a silver-haired, winged priestess wearing a blue robe. A trumpet blast heralds her arrival; she wields a glass knife and speaks only if absolutely necessary.

Earth Elemental

An earth elemental appears as an enormous night crawler with a human head that burrows up out of the ground. It reeks of carrion, but its touch nourishes the earth, and tiny vines sprout wherever it crawls.

Fire Elemental

A fire elemental appears as a blacksmith with a leather apron and a steel hammer. He is annoyed that the magician has disturbed his work and demands to know what is so blasted important.

Water Elemental

A water elemental at first resembles a two-headed flying eel but assumes human form moments after it appears. Its human shape resembles one of the player characters, but its skin has a slimy sheen.

Nature Spirits

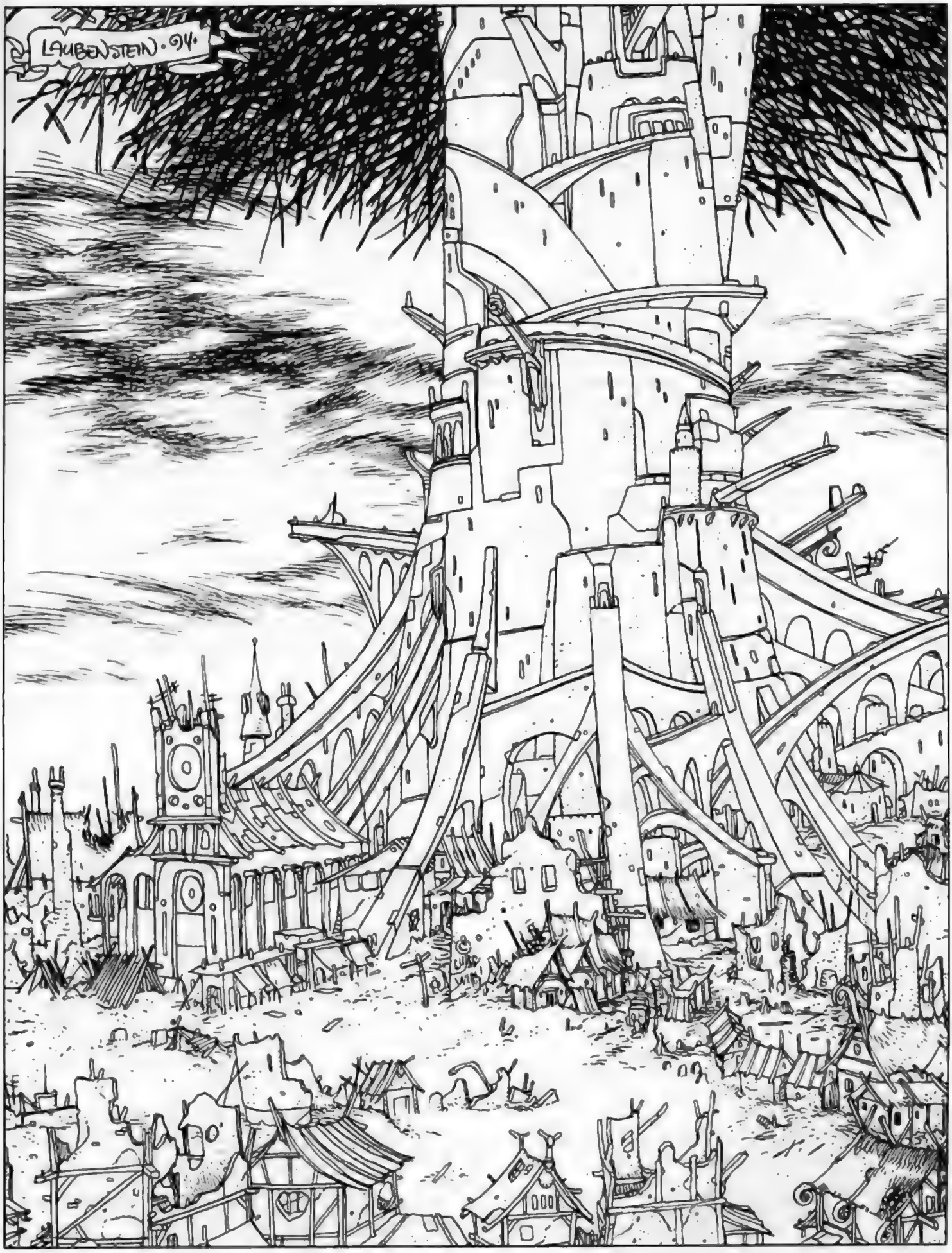
Nature spirits also retain their normal statistics and powers, and they look and behave much like this plane's elemental spirits, except that they are easier to summon. Spirits of Man mimic fire elementals, Spirits of the Air mimic air elementals, Spirits of the Land mimic earth elementals, and Spirits of the Water mimic water elementals.

ABANDON ALL RATIONAL THOUGHT

An important element of this setting is a dreamlike fluidity intended to convey the otherworldly nature of the astral plane. Under normal circumstances, consistency is critical to an effective adventure; this particular Place, however, takes capriciousness as its main aspect. When running this adventure, the gamemaster should feel free to improvise additional details without worrying about why they exist or how they fit into the story. If something does not work out, it can always vanish as soon as the characters look the other way.

Most of these improvisations should involve inconsequential details that have no effect on the adventure, but the gamemaster may also introduce more significant elements if he or she wishes. Armor and weapons can appear and disappear, old adversaries can put in a cameo appearance, characters can change into animals, and so on.

Two plot devices in this adventure further reinforce the irrational atmosphere of the Place. **Interludes** break the flow of the main plot, temporarily transporting the player characters to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PLAYFUL SPIRITS TABLE

Die Roll	Spirit
1	Just ahead, a gnomelike creature waits for the runners with a big black box in his lap. He speaks only if spoken to and seems rather shy. His name is Morris, and he will give the runners the box if they ask about it. He does not know what is inside, but he warns them that it could contain just about anything and that they should be careful. The box can do anything the gamemaster desires.
2	A blue-skinned man in a trench coat is lurking nearby and attempts to get the player characters' attention. He tells them he knows a short cut and that he will show it to them if they promise not to tell anyone he helped them. Upon receiving their promise, he leads them to a trap door that opens into an access tunnel. This tunnel is the backdoor to the Limbo Room (for details, see **Interlude One: The Limbo Room**, p. 112 in **The Tower**.
3	Toady be a liddle froggyman who hoppy-hops up to the bigfolk and starts babbling about anything what crosses his warty liddle mind. Toady be harmless, but he do go on and on and on 'bout nuttin' in particular, pestering the bigfolk with lots of questions 'bout "wut are dey doin" and "wut is dat" and like dat dere. Toady be a cry-baby coward who go away if the bigfolk get mean or get in a fight.
4	Lying on the ground is a strange-looking talisman with a mysterious runemark etched on it. If any of the player characters touches it, a strange figure appears, dressed all in black. His eyes glow with a green fire. This figure is "Mister Mystery," a minor spirit who likes to pretend he is a living enigma. He tries to draw the player characters into a pointless discussion by making up cryptic statements and turning their questions back on them. Once they figure out he is wasting their time, he will vanish (mysteriously).
5	A tiny girl with batlike wings flutters down from the sky and settles on the shoulder of the character with the highest combined Intelligence and Wisdom. She leans down and whispers into his or her ear, warning that "the spirits are restless" and to "avoid distractions." Unwilling to become a distraction herself, the helpful sprite flies off without another word.
6	A strange being that looks like a cross between a street samurai and a tractor comes rumbling and rattling into view. He introduces himself as the Guardian and demands that one of the characters challenge him, claiming they must defeat him to complete the quest. (He is lying.) If no one challenges this false guardian, he looks disappointed and retreats out of view.

another setting. **Flashbacks** return them to an earlier part of the scenario. Both devices are intended to unsettle the players.

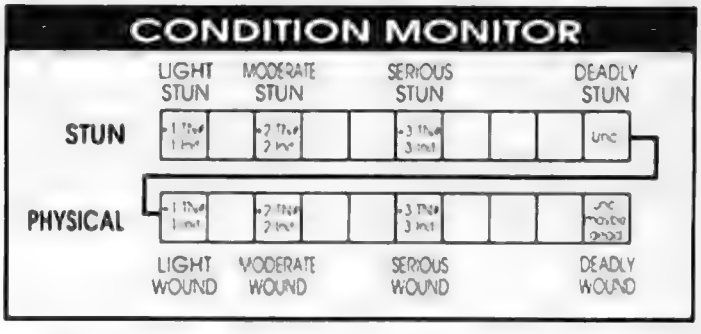
Throughout this adventure, the gamemaster can also keep things mixed up by using the malicious nature of many spirits against the runners. The setting for this part of the quest relies heavily on aspects of the astral planes, so any spirits who happen to be in the area when the player characters show up will more than likely interfere. These creatures get a kick out of playing with the runners. Though most of their pranks should be little more than a nuisance, their actions can become far more serious if the gamemaster wants to play it that way. To generate interfering spirits, roll 1D6 and consult the Playful Spirits Table.

False Guardian

The false Guardian will fight with its metal fists, pummeling its victims into submission. If the characters somehow defeat this thing, all of its armor falls off to reveal a gaunt, shaking figure. The figure offers the runners a concussion grenade in exchange for sparing his miserable life.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
11/5	3 x 2	11	5	4	7	7	5	(7) S, +1 Reach

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Skills: Unarmed Combat 5
Powers: Immunity to Age, Normal Weapons, Pathogens, Poisons



FAMILIAR FACES

By this point in the quest, the characters should be used to looking for and finding familiar faces. For the record, Harlequin is the Architect, Thayla is the Maiden, and Darke is the Foreman. "Mother," who appears in the Cathedral, bears a distinct resemblance to Viviane from the adventure **By the Sword**, but she does *not* resemble Jane Foster.

THE VILLAGE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read this to the players as the transition from *By the Sword*:

With a flash and a sigh you find yourselves emerging from a dark forest. A rolling plain stretches out before you with mountains in the distance. In the foothills lies a small village huddled around what appears to be an enormous tree, reaching high into the clouds and out of sight. Its branches cast a dark shadow over the tiny buildings beneath.

You notice that you are all dressed in shapeless gray robes tied with a black sash, and your equipment is gone. Those of you with cybernetic enhancements feel as if nothing has changed, but the tech looks like ordinary flesh and blood.

Of all the places you've been on this quest, this one promises to be the weirdest yet.

HOOKS

As discussed in the **Overview**, this adventure has a dreamlike feel, with some events occurring in an illogical sequence. The gamemaster needs to walk a fine line between effective use of this technique and sheer confusion. Some confusion is good, but take care not to distract the players too much with inconsequential events.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Village has been abandoned for years and only faintly shows its former glory. As the characters wander through the ruined buildings, they notice odd, anachronistic details (street signs, posters, and other, modern devices). These current-day fragments should be easily identifiable refuse from a major city that well-traveled player characters will recognize as Chicago. If the runners bring these anomalies to the attention of any of the non-player characters they encounter later in the story, the natives consider these details very odd and cannot explain why they exist in the Village.

As the runners draw closer to what they thought from a distance was a tree, they clearly see that it is a great Tower reaching up into the heavens. The "branches" high above the Village seem to be parts of a city reaching outward from the center portion of the Tower, which climbs upward out of sight.

LEAVING SO SOON?

If the player characters try to go any direction except forward, the entire plain lurches and a brick wall appears, stretching as far as the eye can see. After a few anxious moments, a modern-looking door appears, complete with emergency bar and illuminated Exit sign, like the backdoor of a nightclub.

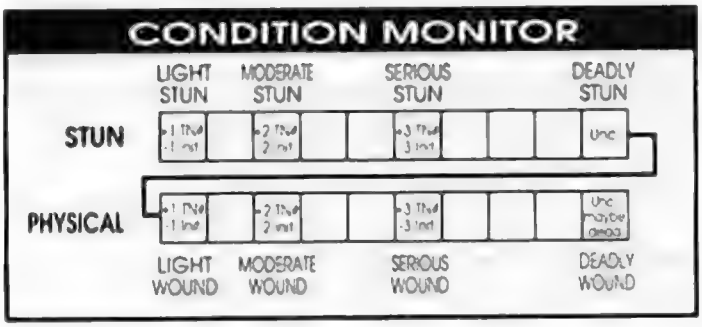
The Exit Door is meant as a broad hint that the runners are going the wrong way. If they don't take the hint and one of them approaches the door, a troll bouncer will appear and bar the way. "Leaving so soon?" he asks, and then adds, "I can't stamp your hand, y'know. If you leave, you're gone. Be a shame to miss the opening act."

Like the Dweller on the Threshold, the Bouncer serves a specific function and has no information for the runners. If they try to question him he acts evasive at first; if they continue to pester him, he gets testy and snaps, "Make up your mind before I decide you're more grief than you're worth." Attacking the Bouncer is sheer folly, because he is actually a powerful spirit creature. If the runners have their hearts set on mayhem, however, go ahead and indulge them.

Bouncer

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
8	4	8	2	2	8	8	3	5/3

Initiative: 3 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 9/4
Skills: Unarmed Combat 7
Powers: Immunity to Age, Normal Weapons, Pathogens, Poisons; Regeneration



If the runners fight the Bouncer, he gives them a chance to back off every time he downs an opponent. Only the magicians among them can do any reliable damage, but against the Bouncer's powers, the runners should not stand a chance.

Most teams will heed the troll's warning and head for the Village, but some players may decide that leaving is the thing to do. If this happens, either let them do it—in which case they automatically fail to complete this part of the quest—or drop all pretense and tell the players that their characters are about to walk away from the adventure.

THE ARCHITECT AND THE CATHEDRAL

At the heart of the Village, in one of the few shafts of light leaking down through the branches of the Tower, stands a vast, ruined Cathedral. A strange figure sits on a stump in the shadows of the Cathedral, slumped over with his head in his hands. At first he appears to be an aged elf covered with cybernetic enhancements, but closer scrutiny shows that he is covered in machines that seem to have grown over and into him like vines.

He comes to life as the player characters approach, moving very slowly. Dust falls from his robes as he tries to reach behind him, moving as if attempting to pull a dagger from his back. If a player character tries to figure out what the elf is doing, he or she discovers a key lodged firmly between the elf's shoulder blades—as if he was some kind of wind-up toy. A few turns of the key breathe new life into the elf, but the player characters cannot dispel the lethargy of his movements. At first he does not seem to notice the runners, but simply moves toward the tool shed and begins to tinker with the machines that cover his body like clockwork parasites.

Sooner or later the player characters will tire of watching the elf and insist that he tell them where they are and who he is. The elf answers with a ritualistic recitation, spoken in a reverent monotone.

Read the following as the elf's answer:

"Who am I? I am Thomas Alva Edison. I am Henry Ford. I am the Genie who can make your dreams come true. I am the Monkey's Paw that can turn your dreams into nightmares. I am Pandora's Box. I am the Architect."

The Architect claims to have no other name and cannot understand the need for one, but suggests that the runners call him Caine if they feel uncomfortable calling him "Architect." The Village also has no other name that he can recall, but he remembers suggesting "Eden" to the Village elders. As the Architect interacts with the player characters, the stiffness slowly leaves him and some of the smaller machines drop off his body. If the runners ask about the machines, the Architect replies that he does not remember them always being there but he has not been paying attention.

The Architect has a story to tell, and the player characters can get it from him in many ways. The simplest is to ask him what is going on, but no matter how convoluted the runners' approach, they eventually hear the following tale.

Read the following aloud, speaking the Architect's dialogue in a monotone:

"It is difficult to look back. It has been so long and so little has happened. I feel rusted straight through—my memories seem as stiff as my body—but I will tell you what I can."

The Architect pauses for a moment, looking up at the sky as though the past is etched in the clouds. Apparently finding whatever he is searching for, he smiles and leans closer to you.

"Let me tell you a story. It may or may not answer your questions, but the truth at the heart of it may help you in your quest."

The strange figure pulls a bellows from a hook and puts the brass nozzle down his throat, pumping air into his chest. Choking out a cloud of dust, he wheezes twice and begins to spin a strange story. Its obvious importance to him compels you to listen closely.

"A long time ago, in a nameless Village, people lived in harmony with the land and the Mother Provider. Then the serpent came, wearing the body of a man as you or I might wear a suit of clothes. Underneath lurked something evil that no one could see. One could smell it sometimes, or catch a glimpse of it in the mirror, but no one could hear him hiss until it was too late.

"The villagers were simple folk who had everything they could ever want. The serpent told them they were poor and that they lived like animals in pathetic huts and that their goddess was a slave driver who denied them the simplest comforts. When the elders asked the serpent to show them what they lacked, he produced a black bag full of strange and wonderful treasure.

"When the people's innocent eyes saw the serpent's hoard, their hearts turned black with lust. They believed his lies and they wanted treasure of their own. The serpent was pleased. He told them he would gladly help them. He told them that the treasure came from the sky, and to get it they had only to build a Tower tall enough to pierce the clouds. He would be the Foreman and would show them the way. All they needed was an Architect."

The storyteller pauses for a moment, overcome by a sadness that you find painful to watch. Mustering his resolve, he fills his lungs with the bellows once more and continues.

"The Architect was young and foolish. He loved from afar a Maiden of uncommon beauty, and his every deed was a misguided effort to win her affections. When the elders asked him to design the Tower, he readily agreed. In a matter of days the villagers abandoned their fields and every man, woman, and child devoted their lives to the Tower's construction.

"After three long years of backbreaking labor, the villagers set the last stone of the most magnificent building they had ever seen. But the elusive clouds still circled far overhead and no one could get any treasure. Instead of praising the Architect for his accomplishments, the villagers cursed him and turned to the Foreman.

"The Tower grew taller and taller, but never tall enough to reach the sky. It grew so huge that the workers began living in its upper reaches, leaving their homes and the Mother Goddess behind. Eventually, everyone save the Architect and the Maiden had vanished into a prison of their own construction to work like slaves for the serpent.

"The Maiden loved the Architect and could not bear what the villagers' betrayal had done to him, so she stayed with him as long as she could. When no one was left in the village, she followed her people into the Tower, swearing to do her best to bring them back. She never returned ... and the foolish boy became a lonely old man doomed to live in the shadow of his pride."

Once finished with his tale, the Architect stands slowly, sending the last of the clinging machines tumbling to the ground. He seems younger and livelier than when he began

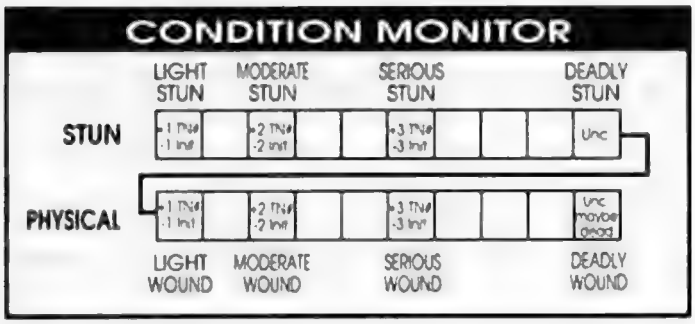
his story. He asks the runners why they have come and what they intend to do. If their purpose seems noble, he takes them to the tool shed and shows them a sword hanging from a hook. He tells them that he made it to kill the serpent, but he forged it from the last of his courage and so did not have the resolve to wield it. If the runners swear to find the Maiden, the Architect gives them the weapon.

The Architect accompanies the runners during their investigation of the ruins if they ask him to, but he will not enter the Tower under any circumstances. He cannot even bear to look at it, and knows that someone must go in his stead.

Architect

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	3	3	4	8	8	6	5	0

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 2/3
Skills: Architecture 10, Metalworking 8



The Architect's Sword

The sword is a magical artifact forged specifically to fight the Enemy, though even the Architect does not know this. A simple sword of no particular craftsmanship, it functions as a normal sword [+1 Reach, (STR + 2)M damage]. Certain of the Enemy's metaplanar manifestations are Vulnerable to the weapon (see p. 220, **SRII**).

The sword also translates to other metaplanar realities and stays with the runners in each of the additional scenes and adventures of **Harlequin's Back.** It does not, however, return to the real world at the conclusion of the story.

The Cathedral

This building is in better shape than most in the Village. In the foyer stands a marble basin filled with a warm, translucent yellow liquid that tastes like chicken soup. On the wall behind the basin is a row of pegs from which dozens of masks hang, in various shapes and sizes but all made from simple materials. If the Architect is present, he comments that it was once the custom for the devout to wear a mask in the presence of their Patron so that the ugliness of their mortal features would not offend her.

When the player characters enter the Cathedral, the stillness is broken by a cloud of doves that flutter to life, filling the air for a few moments before settling in the rafters. The fluttering of their wings is briefly accompanied by a musical sound that echoes in the distance. It is impossible to tell where the sound came from.

Each of the stained-glass windows flanking the sanctuary displays an image from a different religion. All religions are depicted, but the player characters will not likely recognize most of them. If a runner gazes long enough on a single image, it begins to move. The observer falls into a fascinated trance from which only his companions can awaken him.

Near the back of the Cathedral stands a dais surmounted by a marble altar stone. A statue once stood atop the altar but it has been toppled and lies in shattered fragments strewn across the first few stairs leading up to the dais. Lying on the altar stone is a strange collection of objects that could be mistaken for garbage, save for the fact that they are carefully arrayed on velvet cushions. On the first cushion lies a handful of mints, on the next a pornographic magazine, on another a pile of gold coins, and on the last a gun. The gun is an Ares Predator II loaded with 10 normal rounds, and it is one of the few weapons available to the player characters during the adventure if someone has the presence of mind to take it. The weapon is inexplicably warm to the touch, as though it had just been used. The barrel is hot and does not cool down.

If the Architect is present or the runners ask him about these objects, he tells them the Foreman brought these with him from the sky and presented them to the Village as a gift. So many people wanted to see them that they had to be dis-

played in a public place. At first they were kept in the Hall of the Elders, but eventually the demand to see them became so great that the Cathedral was the only place large enough to accommodate the crowds. Eventually the villagers toppled the statue to make room for the precious trash.

Unquiet Spirit

Before the arrival of the Foreman, the Cathedral was dedicated to a being known only as "Mother." If the player characters ask the Architect about Mother, he tells them, "She was our Patron and my muse, but they tore her down to make room for the Foreman's gifts." Mother is a powerful spirit who represents the Great Powers of the universe, and she still resides in the Cathedral. When the characters approach the altar, their presence rouses her.

When the characters approach the altar, read the following:

As you near the altar a wind rushes through the rafters, disturbing the doves, who fly off in a white cloud of feathers. The breeze slowly gathers strength, lifting the dust off the chancel floor in a small whirlwind. Dust and grit give the whirlwind substance as it hovers over the shattered statue. The sound of the wind rises to a deafening howl; it drives you back to the foyer where you stand clutching your ears. Barely visible at the heart of the maelstrom, the chunks of stone begin to glow as they rise slowly into the air. The stones come together, and a thunderclap deafens you as a bolt of lightning sunders the altar stone and sends you flying out the door. When the dust settles and your vision clears, you see a woman in front of you, her body a jigsaw of shattered stone held together by bands of light.

Mother has been reborn, but her power is as shattered as her statue. She wanders around the sanctuary, obviously confused. She will stop if addressed, but if the player character who speaks is not wearing a mask the spirit becomes disgusted by what she sees and looks away. If asked why she averts her eyes, Mother says, "Your features may be fair, but I can see your soul reflected in your face. Your sins are blemishes I cannot bear."

If the characters ask Mother who she is, she looks puzzled and responds hesitantly. She does not know who she is, but she knows her children are gone. She feels lonely and sad; she misses them terribly. She asks the player characters to bring her children back. If they agree, she seems satisfied. The light holding her together fades, depositing a heap of rock on the floor.

DEADFALL

A dark ring around the base of the Tower looks from a distance like fallen leaves around a tree, but on closer examination is revealed as a ring of graves with strange markers fashioned from salvaged scraps. Each marker is adorned with the name "Icarus" and a brief epitaph. All of the epitaphs are different, but resemble the following examples:

"In seeking heaven you found the earth."

"You were three miles high but now you're six feet under."

"What goes up must come down."

All the epitaphs mention heaven and earth somehow and have a cynical tone. If the runners ask the Architect about the graves he tells them that the bodies started to fall 200 days after the last villager entered the Tower. A fresh corpse falls from the sky every couple of weeks on average, apparently at random. One week four bodies fell, and three months once went by with no deadfall. Five hundred villagers climbed the tower; during the five years they have lived up there, almost 200 have fallen.

The Architect thinks the villagers are working themselves to death, and that they have become so devoted to their task that they hurl the dead over the wall instead of wasting the time it would take to climb back down and bury them properly. He buries the dead out of habit, but admits that he is often tempted to leave them lying in the ruins.

A Visitation and a Warning

If the player characters linger amid the deadfall, their presence rouses the spirits of the dead. These phantoms announce themselves by devouring the light and sounding the hollow bells of the damned. Suddenly engulfed by darkness, the player characters will probably ready their weapons. Give the players a chance to overreact by asking them to state their characters' intentions.

After a few tense moments, a small host of phantoms rise from their graves, muttering a deafening litany of regrets. These phantoms are humanoid apparitions bound to the earth with glowing chains. Desperate to ascend, they strain against their bonds. The phantoms take no heed of the player characters at first, but must answer if addressed. They no longer remember who they were; they know only that they want to "rise up," and they beg the characters to free them. Only the Architect's sword can sever their bonds.

If the runners figure out how to free them, the spirits rise into the sky until the last disappears. For a few moments, nothing happens—then the phantoms fall back to earth like rain, the light of their joy driving away the darkness.

One of the spirits remains for a short while, drawn to the character with the highest Charisma (in case of a tie, the phantom prefers female characters or shamans). The phantom assumes the aspect of a handsome young man dressed like a medieval peasant. He thanks the runners and asks them to free the others, indicating the Tower. He also warns them to watch the sky.

If the Architect is present, the phantom asks his forgiveness, saying, "We did not understand." Once he has said his piece, the last phantom sinks slowly into the ground.

DEBUGGING

In this surreal adventure, the gamemaster can get away with almost any strategy to get the runners back on track. This chapter also provides a rich environment for exploration of the surrounding area, the Village, and eventually the Tower. Don't feel hampered by the strangeness. Go nuts. Have fun.

THE TOWER

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Though you can see it with your own eyes and the Architect told you of its construction, you still find it hard to believe that the thing you thought was a gigantic tree is a manmade structure. Even now, standing at its base and staring at the vast, open-girder superstructure that reaches kilometers into the sky, you can hardly comprehend it.

But you believe—and some of you know—you must climb to succeed. It occurs to you that the Foreman must have said the same thing to the people of the Village.

HOOKS

This climb and this structure are both impossible. The scale of everything is just too big for the runners to grasp, but they know they have some part in it. They must go on. They must go up.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Eventually the player characters should figure out that everything they need to accomplish in this adventure is in the Tower somewhere. The base of the Tower looks like the skeletal superstructure of a skyscraper or the foundation of a bridge. The characters will have to improvise climbing gear from the equipment in the Architect's shed. Once the runners come up with some feasible means of climbing, let them do it. They need not make any Success Tests; they simply climb.

After climbing for a few days, they encounter the first Guardian.

GUARDIAN NUMBER ONE

The Foreman expected the Architect to come after him one day, and so he left a Guardian behind to prevent the Architect from climbing into the Tower's upper reaches. The Guardian resembles a kraken, but it is obviously a land creature and uses its tentacles to maneuver around the superstructure. The Guardian is covered in fine brown hair and has four eyes clustered just above an enormous mouth. Of its ten tentacles, it uses six to move and four to attack.

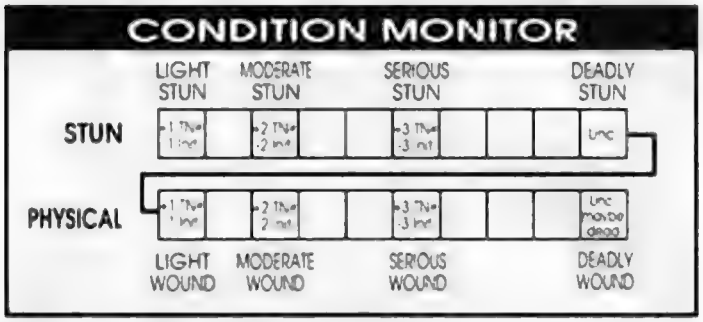
Guardian 1 (Kraken)

This enormous creature attacks exclusively with its Engulf power, which allows it to grab the runners with its tentacles and throw them into its gaping mouth. Its mouth is a gateway to another world; once the Guardian has Engulfed the entire group, go to **Interlude One: The Limbo Room**.

When the characters next encounter this Guardian, it has lost its Engulf, Immunity to Normal Weapons, and Regeneration powers, making it much easier to defeat. When the runners finally slay the beast it begins to putrefy, slowly turning into rancid sludge that drips down the face of the Tower in greasy blobs (yuck).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
12/4	5 x 2	18	—	3	6	8	7	9S, +3 Reach

Initiative: 7 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 7/4
Powers: Engulf (Special); Immunity to Age, Normal Weapons, Pathogens, Poisons; Regeneration
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Architect's sword)



INTERLUDE ONE: THE LIMBO ROOM

Those Engulfed by the Guardian emerge in the lobby of a private club. This setting is identical to the player characters' own world, and the runners appear wearing their usual clothing and carrying their usual equipment. If he can manage it, the gamemaster should make the players suspect that their characters have somehow left the metaplanes.

Any character who leaves the club finds himself on a dusty road in a rocky landscape reminiscent of an Arizona desert. The Limbo Room seems to be a roadhouse of sorts, with several cars and motorcycles parked outside.

The lobby is small and not particularly well-lit. The club, however, is rather nice. The low lights lend an interesting ambiance to the joint. Soon after the runners' arrival, a Head Waiter appears and leads the runners to a large booth near the stage. As they pass the band, the lead singer breaks into an a cappella rendition of "Games without Frontiers." At the table of the booth sits a lovely young girl wearing a tight-fitting spandex dress; behind her stands an elf in a long black coat. If the players ask about the other patrons of the club, they notice several suspicious-looking figures lurking about.

If the players ask if their host or his associates are armed, have one of them make a Perception (4) Test. If the runner achieves at least 2 successes, he or she identifies a long lump in the elf's coat, an unlikely bulge in the young lady's handbag, and a suitcase on the floor next to the girl that could contain just about anything.

As the player characters approach, the girl types a command into the keyboard on her lap and the monitors built into the table flicker to life. Displayed on the screen is a trideo image of a heavy-set man in a white suit sitting behind a large black desk. He seems anxious about something and fidgets with a string of rosary beads. Note that the monitor is connected to the Foreman's office through an approximation of the Matrix. The player characters can deck into this false Matrix if they think to ask.

The man in the suit identifies himself as Bill Foreman. He acts friendly but there is something sinister about him. He introduces his associates as Blaster and Eve. Both watch the characters suspiciously. This incarnation of the Foreman has been sent to test the characters' dedication, and he tries to bribe them to abandon the quest.

Read the following:

"You are involved in something you cannot hope to understand. If you persist, you will face powers you cannot hope to overcome. Continue along this course and you will all die before the day is out. Worst of all, you will have wasted your lives attempting to complete a fool's errand. I implore you to reconsider. The powers I represent are prepared to compensate you well if you leave now. I can show you the way out and save your lives in the process."

Having said his piece, Foreman tells Eve to place the briefcase on the table. It contains anything the gamemaster decides the player characters might want. Make the contents an effective temptation; use something more insightful than truckloads of cash. If they accept the bribe, that's it. On to the next Place, folks.

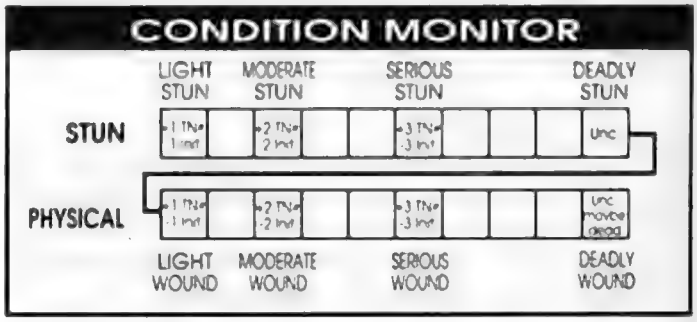
If the runners turn down Foreman's offer, the disappointed villain mutters "Pity." His image disappears from the terminal, replaced by a shrieking skull that orders his minions to attack. Blaster, Eve, and assorted thugs spring into action and attempt to gun down the player characters before they can get away.

Eve

Eve is a vicious samurai who only attacks male characters, going first for those with high Charisma.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	6	5	5	4	6	2	5 (9)	0

Initiative: 9 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6, Etiquette (Corporate) 4, Etiquette (Street) 3, Firearms 4, Interrogation 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Cyberware: Cybereyes (Low-Light and Themographic w/Flare Compensation), Retractable Spurs, Wired Reflexes (2)
Gear: Ares Predator [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/2 extra clips, Laser Sight (–1 modifier to target numbers)]

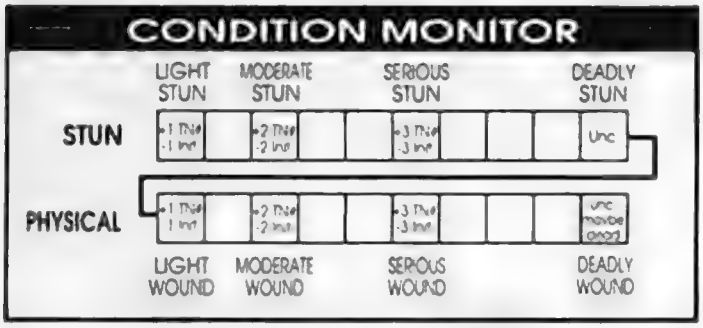


Blazer

Blazer is a hitman who has orders to take out any spellcasters. He holds back from the fight until someone starts casting spells.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	5	4	5	5	5	3	5 (7)	5/3

Initiative: 7 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Etiquette (Corporate) 3, Etiquette (Street) 5, Firearms 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Cyberware: Dermal Plating (1), Smartlink, Wired Reflexes (1)
Gear: Armor Jacket (5/3), Browning Max-Power [Heavy Pistol, 10 (clip), SA, 9M], Heckler & Koch HK227 [SMG, 28 (clip) SA/BF/FA, 7M, w/2 extra clips, Gas Vent II, Smartlink]

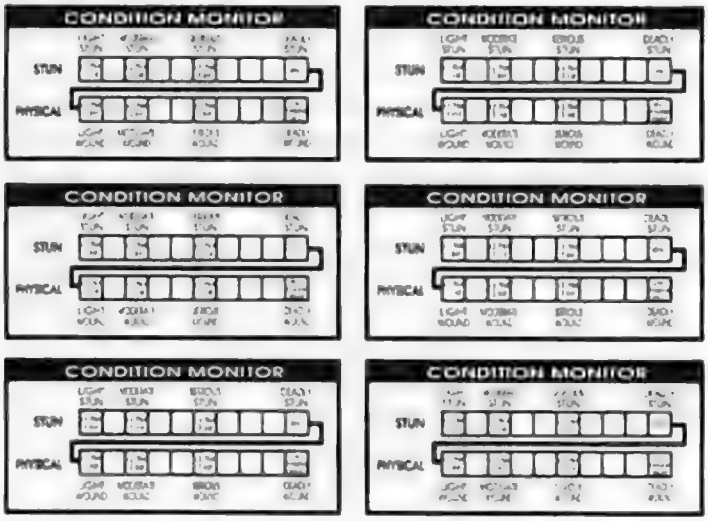


Thugs

One thug appears for each of the player characters. Each thug has orders to kill a specific player character and will only attack that character. If a thug's target goes down, the thug puts a bullet through his victim's head to finish the job and then walks calmly out of the club. If someone tries to stop a departing thug, the thug tries to fight his way out.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	5	4	3	3	4	4	4	4/3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3
Skills: Armed Combat 3, Etiquette (Street) 3, Firearms 4, Unarmed Combat 3



Gear: Ares Predator [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/2 extra clips], Armored Vest w/Plates (4/3), Club [Reach 1, 6M Stun]

FLASHBACK ONE: ANOTHER VILLAGE

Once Bill Foreman is gone, the player characters can leave the Limbo Room whenever they want (assuming they survive the ambush). Once they leave the club, they reappear at the edge of the forest through which they walked at the start of this adventure. Go back to the beginning of the scenario and start all over again, as if the runners have just arrived on this metaplane. When the runners climb the Tower this time, they encounter the Guardian again, but it has lost much of its power and can no longer Engulf them.

WORK IN PROGRESS

After an arduous climb, the runners reach an area of the Tower where the villagers clearly abandoned the Architect's original design. The Gothic look gives way to a post-industrial nightmare that looks more like a scaffold than a completed structure.

The player characters can make out several figures working in the superstructure, all dangling from complex harnesses. They seem to be prying loose a redundant cross brace. As the runners climb higher and higher, the Tower becomes broader, assuming the treelike shape they observed when they first saw it.

As they climb, they pass through areas of the Tower once inhabited but abandoned as the Tower grew. The volume of each once-inhabited area increases geometrically as the Tower rises and widens. Astute player characters notice that though the overall size of these areas increases, the size of area that was inhabited decreases.

The architectural style of the inhabited areas changes as well, moving from the emotionally significant Gothic stylings near the base to the post-modern, sprawl-like morass near the top. Finally, after days of climbing stairs and ladders by hand and foot, the runners feel they are nearing the top of the Tower. They pass through a layer of construction to which large gas-filled balloons are anchored. Beyond that, they reach daylight again in an area that bears a distinct resemblance to the interconnecting roofs of a modern sprawl. In this place they find the Foreman.

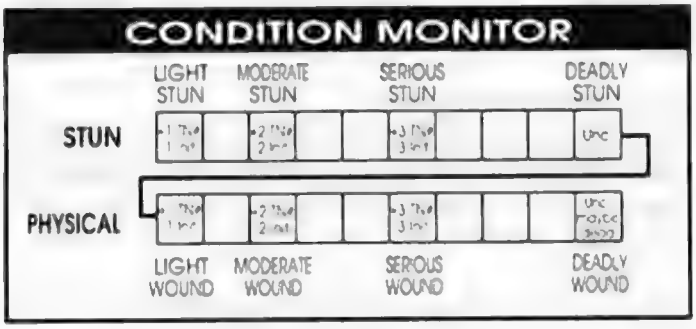
In the Head Office

The Foreman lives in a bunker on the top of a platform that rises above the cloud of balloons. The balloons are keeping the unstable Tower from collapsing under its own weight. An open elevator and a series of ladders similar to those used on a construction site lead upward. Both are guarded. The bunker is additionally protected by Guardian Number Two in the shape of the Henchman—an acromegalic giant covered in metal plates and spikes that have been riveted onto his body—and by a seemingly unlimited supply of gunmen.

Guardian 2 (Henchman)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
8 (11)	4	8	2	2	6	1.2	3 (5)	5/3

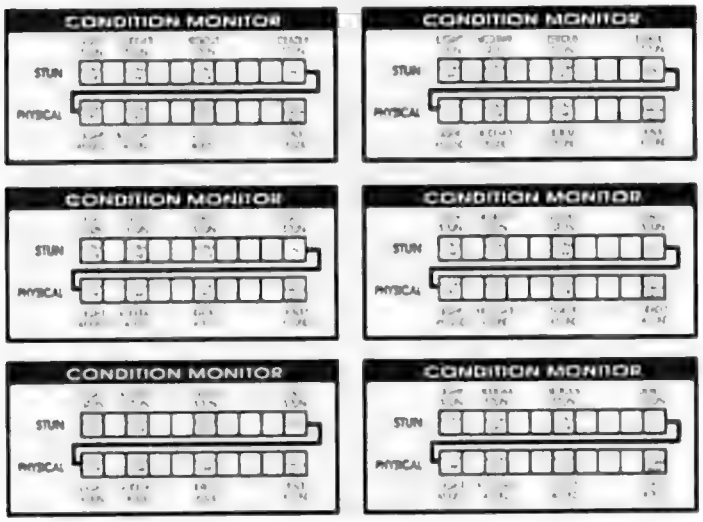
Initiative: 3 (5) + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6
Cyberware: Dermal Plating (3), Spurs (8M), Wired Reflexes (1)
Powers: Pain Resistance (Physical Adept ability) (6), Regeneration
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Architect's sword)
Notes: +1 Reach



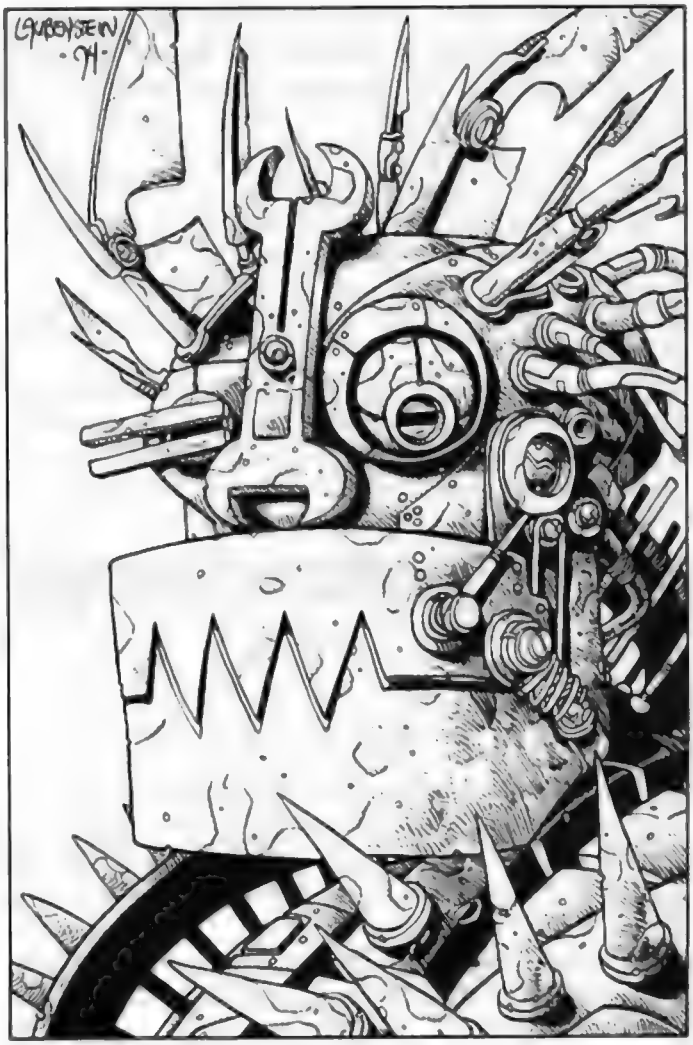
Gunmen

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	6	5	—	2	4	5	4	5/3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Powers: Immunity to Age, Pathogens, Poisons
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (the Architect's sword)
Gear: 2 Heavy Pistol Hands (9M, unlimited ammo)
Notes: The gunmen have heavy pistols in place of hands and may fire each weapon twice in an action.



In every round another gunman emerges from the bunker, a chamber with sliding steel doors that open and close every Combat Turn. The chamber is extremely durable, and any attempts to damage it are a waste of time. The tubes and wires connected to the room are more fragile—roughly half of these can be broken. To break them takes one character 6 rounds, 2 characters 3 rounds, and 3 or more characters 2 rounds. Once the tubes and wires are broken, the gunmen appear at a slower rate (one every 2 Combat Turns). The runners cannot jam the door—the gunmen just keep coming, and coming, and coming. (Sorry, chummer.)



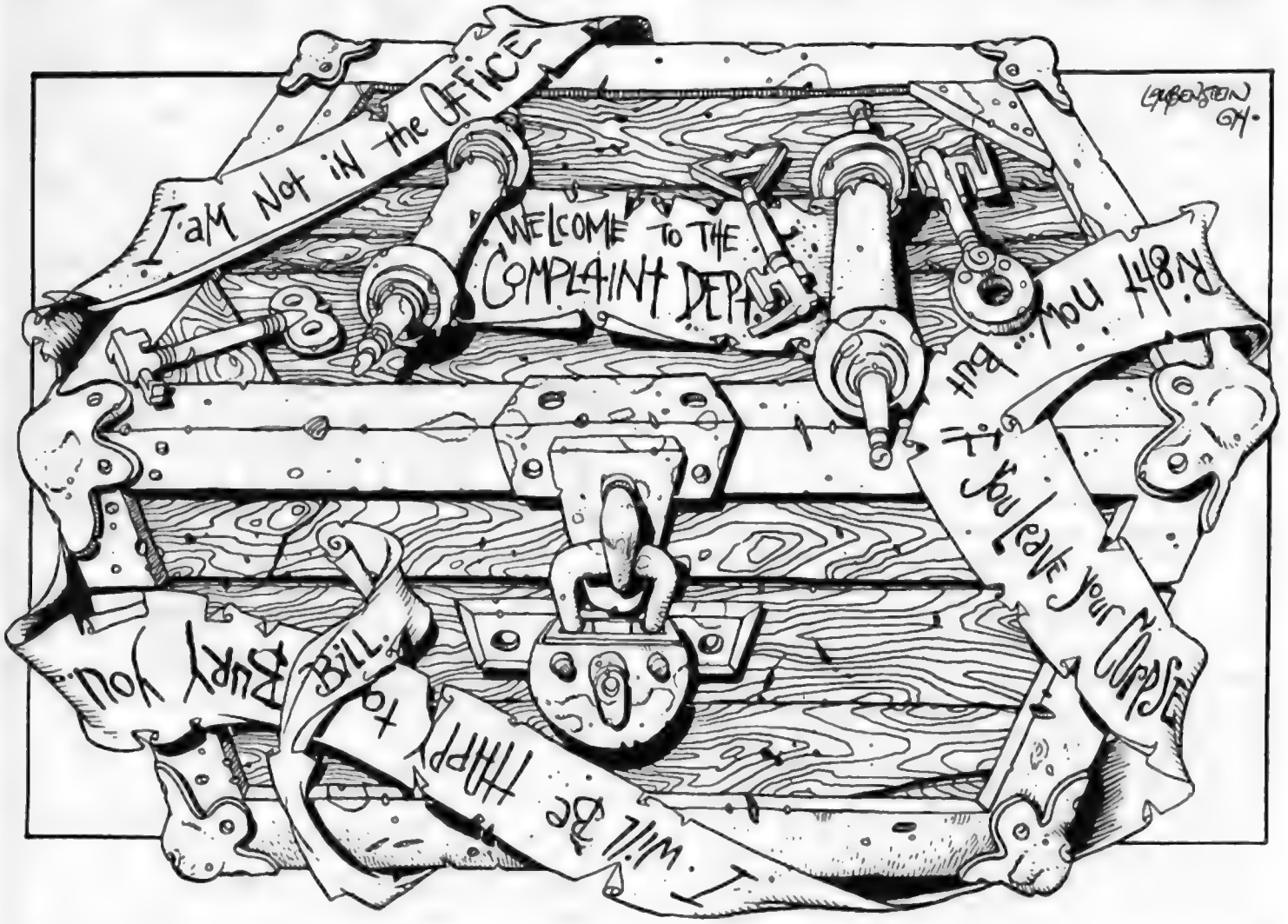
The Guardian tries to stop the characters from entering the bunker; if they get past him and the gunmen, they find a large concrete room like a bomb shelter without a door, filled from floor to ceiling with bizarre machinery. All the machinery is connected to a trideo terminal like the one the runners saw in the Limbo Room. Connected to the terminal is an electrode circlet, something like the primitive jacks used by early deckers. If a runner places the circlet on his head, he glows briefly and then fades out of existence before any of his companions can remove the device. The vanished character leaves no trace behind.

Any runner who checks the terminal reads the message "Labyrinth Active," followed by the vanished character's name and a five-minute countdown. If another runner uses the circlet, his or her name is added to the list. When the five minutes are up, run **The Labyrinth** (pp. 115–119) with the characters who entered the Labyrinth. Two turns after the last player character who intends to go enters the Labyrinth, the gunmen stop appearing.

DEBUGGING

See the **Debugging** section in **The Village**, p. 110.

THE LABYRINTH



TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

With a bright flash, you appear in a small stone room. A heavy wooden door with a keyhole in the center is the only exit. Four chests line the wall across from the door, and a table sits in the middle of the room. Arrayed on the table are three keys and a scroll. You notice that you are wearing a black robe and have no weapons, armor, or equipment save for a dull knife tucked in your sash.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The scroll looks ancient and bears a handwritten message in a clumsy scrawl as if the writer was in a hurry. The message reads, "Welcome to the Complaint Department. I am not in the office right now but if you leave your corpse I will be happy to bury you." It is signed "Bill."

The chests are very heavy and supernaturally durable. Only the keys will open them. If the player characters unlock one of the chests, the gamemaster should make a big deal out of asking which one, even though it doesn't really matter. No matter which chest they open, the runners find the same things: some extra clothes, a small box of antique data disks marked "1 thru 12," two clips of sport-rifle ammunition, a pack of matches, and a ball of twine. Nothing of value is in any of the chests. Naturally, the runners will assume that the chest or chests they didn't open had the important stuff inside. (It's all a mind game, chummer.)

None of the keys work in the wooden door. The door does not open normally, but if a runner rolls one or more successes on a Strength (4) Test it pops right open to reveal a set of stairs heading down into darkness.

EYE FOR A LIE

As the player characters descend the shallow stairs, they feel a chill wind as though something very cold awaits them at the bottom. Eventually they reach a room about the same size as the one they just left, filled with ice and snow. The air inside is freezing.

In the center of the room is a well with no rope or bucket. A raven perches on the edge, scrutinizing the runners with strangely pale eyes. Near the back of the room, directly behind the well, is a frost-covered stone slab with markings on it. The well, the slab, and the ice and snow represent attempts by the spirits in the Labyrinth to replicate the Norse legend in which Odin sacrificed his right eye to the Well of Wisdom in exchange for omniscience. The spirits are having fun with the runners and would find it infinitely amusing if one of them actually plucked out an eye and hurled it down a well because of an old story.

The player characters can read the markings on the stone if they clear the frost away. Though completely meaningless, the markings look like some kind of code the runners are not clever enough to crack. As they attempt to read it (undoubtedly calling for all sorts of Magic Theory Tests and the like), the raven croaks "An eye for the Truth!" and then cackles. It says nothing else for as long as the runners remain in this room.

The raven can be killed easily and with no untoward consequences; it is only a dumb bird, after all. In fact, nothing happens at all unless a runner decides to pluck out an eye and drop it in the well, or the team collectively decides to do nothing.

If someone gets carried away and pokes his or her eye out, the character deals himself a Serious wound. The character bleeds horribly, dying within a matter of minutes, unless someone staunches the bleeding by achieving at least 2 successes in a Biotech (First Aid) (6) Test or using healing magic. The only response to the gift of the eye down the well is a "plork" when the eyeball hits bottom and hysterical laughter from the raven (or its corpse). The malevolent bird then vanishes.

Once the eye is "donated" or the runners decide to simply wait and see what happens, a hidden door opens in a wall, allowing them to leave the chamber.

Like most of the Labyrinth, the snow-filled chamber is a joke and a waste of time.

INTO THE LABYRINTH

The door leads into a maze of bare stone rooms and corridors. The entire place is an illusion; no door or hall leads anywhere except back in on itself. Let the runners wander; have them periodically make Intelligence Tests and write down the pointless results. Let them also figure out ways to determine where in the Labyrinth they have already been, and then confuse or counter their scheme. When the players begin to get frustrated, have them find an open door and move on to **Game of Chance**.

Game of Chance

At the heart of the maze is a massive chamber resembling an arena of some kind. Machinery all over the ceiling and back wall makes a rhythmic noise. Chains and wires dangle uselessly, and leaky pipes dribble unfamiliar fluids onto the concrete floor.

At a folding card table sits a massive cockroach in a bad plaid suit, shuffling a deck of common playing cards. It chitters musically to itself but looks up anxiously when the player characters enter. (Yes, this creature bears a distinct resemblance to the insect spirits of the Universal Brotherhood and their ilk. It is, however, just another bizarre aspect of this maddening Place.)

This cockroach is Guardian Number Three, and its purpose is to find out what the runners are willing to sacrifice for their quest.

The Guardian welcomes the runners by fussing over them, retrieving folding chairs for each of them and offering them snacks from a side table (chips, dip, cold cuts, and cold beer). If the player characters ask who he is, the Guardian answers in the same way as the Architect, speaking in the same ritualistic monotone.

Read the following passage:

"Who am I? I am Frank the Enforcer. I am Cerberus. I am the lock with no key. I am the Immovable Object. I am the Guardian."

The Guardian tells the runners that he knows they are looking for the Maiden and that he can show them the door to the Back Room where she waits to be rescued.

Guardian 3 (Cerberus Bug)

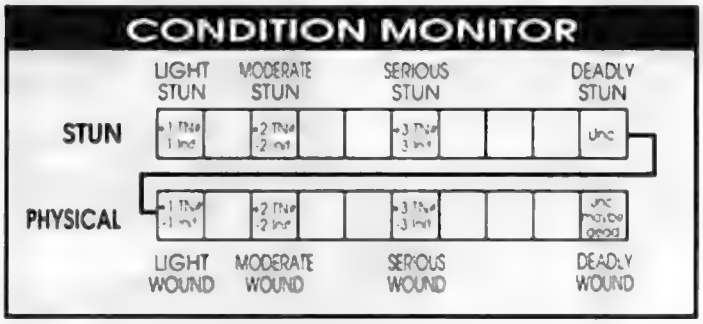
B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
9/6	6 x 3	12	2	4	8	6	5	9S, +1 Reach

Initiative: 5 + 4D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 8/4

Powers: Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Smell); Hardened Armor; Immunity to Age, Normal Weapons, Pathogens, Poisons; Noxious Breath; Regeneration; Venom

Weaknesses: Reduced Senses (Sight), Vulnerability (Architect's sword)



This creature is deadly in its lair, and so fighting the Guardian is a waste of time. It is a powerful spirit in its element, and the runners are on an astral quest that puts them in its power. If they insist on using brute force, the Guardian reluctantly accommodates them, shedding its clothes as it swells to gigantic proportions. The runners' only hope of defeating it is to strike it with the Architect's sword, which causes painful wounds that it cannot regenerate. The Guardian uses its noxious breath to incapacitate its opponents and concentrates its attacks on a chosen victim until that victim goes down.

The Guardian fights for as long as the characters keep coming, pausing every time one of them falls unconscious or dies to offer its opponents the opportunity to stop this foolishness and get down to business. If the characters manage to kill the thing through some incredible stroke of luck, it decomposes before their eyes, turning to dust in less than a minute. When it is gone, the door to the Back Room appears amid the machinery.

What the Guardian really wants to do is play cards. To properly play out this scene, the gamemaster should have on hand a deck of standard playing cards and a large collection of poker chips (black and red if possible, though pennies or anything else will do).

When the player characters sit down, the Guardian passes each some black poker chips from an apparently empty pocket in its suit. Each player gets a number of chips equal to the number of points in his character's personal Karma Pool. Don't tell the players what the chips are; let them make the connection. If the player characters ask their host what the chips represent, he says they are "something precious." Once he has passed everyone their chips, he takes a pile of chips for himself equal to twice the total of all the runners' chips.

The rest of the encounter is a game of cards. The Guardian plays each player character in turn for any amount they like, matching their ante chip for chip. He will not play a character twice until everyone has had a turn. The game can be any game all the players know (blackjack (21) works well). If your players aren't card players, just cut the deck for each character—the high card wins. If a player character wins a hand or a cut, he gets to keep his chips plus the Guardian's (thereby increasing his Karma Pool). If the Guardian wins, he brushes all the wagered chips into a hole in the table. When this happens, the losing runner feels a sudden, wrenching pain and a sense of loss as though something precious has been taken from him. The character loses a number of Karma Points from his Karma Pool equal to the number of chips he bet.

If a character runs out of chips or asks if he can have more, the Guardian chitters with delight and gives the runner 20 red chips. These chips represent damage. For every red chip lost to the Guardian, mark off a box on the losing character's Condition Monitor starting with Stun and progressing to Physical damage if all Stun boxes are filled in. The character does not fall unconscious when 10 boxes of Stun damage have been filled; however, the character does die if he or she loses the last red chip. Any Karma Pool points gambled away here are lost only for the duration of **The Impossible Dream**.

If the player characters take all of the Guardian's chips or decide to end the game, the Guardian collects the cards and squares off the pack, returning them to a jacket pocket. "Well played," he says, and begins to decompose, curling up and turning gray before the runners' eyes. In moments the carapace cracks and the creature's corpse turns to dust. With that, the machines grind to a stop and a section of wall moves aside, revealing a red door containing a painted-over window. The red door is the entrance to the Back Room.

The Maiden and the Invisible Cage

In the Back Room a beautiful girl lies inside a chalk circle. The walls of her bare, unfinished room are covered in newspaper clippings that contain the obituaries of all the people the runners have ever killed. The only light comes from a flickering battery-powered camping lamp that sits in one corner. When the runners get closer they see that the girl has a metal clamp around her head that seals her mouth shut. The runners cannot remove the clamp at this point, no matter how hard they try.

The chalk circle has meaning only for the Maiden; the runners can cross it or erase it whenever they please. When they wake the girl, she tries to fight them off. To calm her, a runner must achieve at least one success in a Charisma (6) Test.

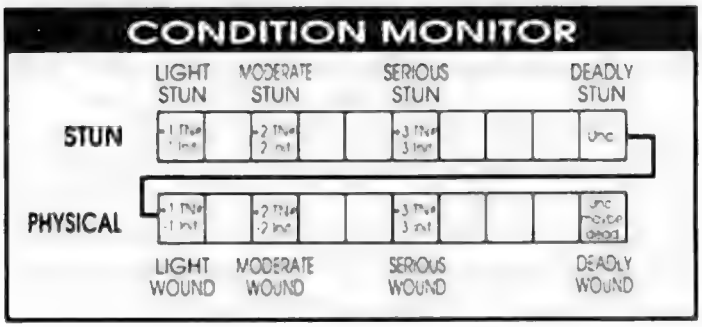
Painfully shy, the Maiden suspects some kind of trick, and so fears the runners until they convince her they are trying to help. The easiest way to reassure her is to show her some evidence that they have met the Architect, most likely his sword. Like the other NPCs in this adventure, the Maiden has no proper name anymore; she remembers having a name once, but

she has forgotten it. She seems disturbed that she cannot remember her name. Physically, she reflects aspect of Talia from **Aftermath**, Celia from **A Fistful of Karma**, and interestingly, Nimue (the Lady of the Lake) from **By the Sword** (though none of those other women truly resembles her).

The Maiden

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
2	4	2	6	6	8	6	5	0

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/4
Skills: Singing 10



The Foreman imprisoned the Maiden years ago, locking her in this room and drawing the circle around her. He told her that if she tried to leave the circle or the room, he would know and would send his minions to kill the Architect. The Maiden knew the Foreman could make good on this threat and so she never tried to escape.

She cannot overcome her mental block and cross the chalk line even if the runners erase it. They must push, pull, or carry her across it. The moment she crosses over, the room dissolves into nothing and the runners and the Maiden find themselves in the forest near the Village (see **Flashback Two: Showdown**).

FLASHBACK TWO: SHOWDOWN

The ruined Village looks the same as it did in **Flashback One** (see p. 113), except that the ruins are in even worse shape. The Maiden immediately sets off to find the Architect, and so the team makes its way to the Cathedral. They find the Foreman and some of his minions using metal plates and cement to seal the Architect up in an old section of the broken wall. As the runners approach, the Foreman screams in rage and he and his minions attack.

At this point, the runners may think of having the Maiden sing to ward off or damage the Foreman and his group. Unfortunately, she cannot sing with the gag in place.

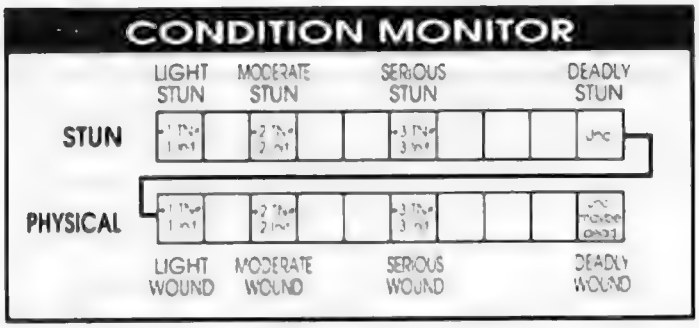
The Foreman

The Foreman is the same man in the white suit the characters have been seeing in the monitors all along. His lower body ends in a bulbous, scorpion-like tail, though he cannot sting with it. He shrieks when the player characters draw near, revealing a mouth lined with fangs. (At that moment he bears a distinct resemblance to Oscuro from **Aftermath** and Trey from **A Fistful of Karma**.)

When killed, the Foreman curls up into a ball and bursts into flames, howling and thrashing around as he dies. The body is reduced to ash in a matter of moments. In the pile of ash lies a silver key that unlocks the metal gag on the Maiden.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	6	5	5	4	6	2	5 (9)	6/6

Initiative: 9 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 8/4
Skills: Firearms 6, Unarmed Combat 7
Gear: Ares Predator [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/2 extra clips, Laser Sight (–1 modifier to target numbers)]

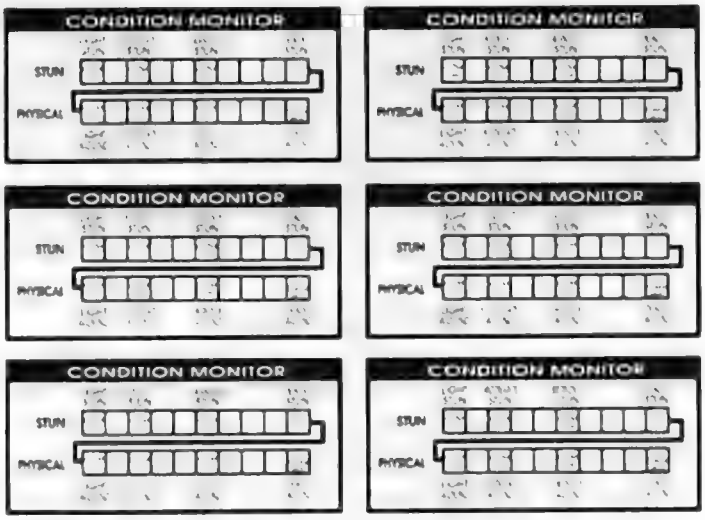


Beetlebugs (6)

At first glance, these creatures look like the gunmen the player characters encountered the first time they broke into the bunker. They are actually roach-like bugmen (like Guardian Number Three) wearing cheap suits and Halloween masks. As they fight, their masks fall off and their suits tear, revealing the insect horror within.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
3	6	5	—	2	4	5	4	9S, +3 Reach

Initiative: 4 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Powers: Immunity to Age, Pathogens, Poisons
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (the Architect's sword)
Note: Though these creatures initially resemble the gunmen from earlier in this adventure, they do not have Heavy Pistol hands.



EPILOGUE

Once the runners defeat the Foreman, they and the Maiden find themselves emerging from the bunker at the top of the Tower. Gathered around are the remaining villagers who have heard rumors of or seen the commotion the runners have caused. The villagers are overjoyed to see the Maiden, having been told she was among the first to die during the Tower's construction. Able to speak now, she tells them the Foreman has tricked them into doing a terrible thing and that they should labor on the ground getting on with their lives instead of building a pointless Tower to the sky. The runners can add whatever emotional or logical support they like to the Maiden's words. Slowly convinced of the truth, the villagers put down their tools and follow the Maiden down the Tower.

The descent takes days, but finally they all reach the Architect at the bottom, who is joyfully reunited with his Maiden. As this homecoming (of sorts) takes place, someone notices that something is happening to the Tower. Looking up, the runners see that the stabilizing balloons have broken free and are floating away. With the balloons gone, the Tower sways and buckles. The people panic and start to run away from the base of the Tower, but the Architect shouts to them to stand and wait. They do, and the Maiden begins to sing in a voice as pure as crystal, calming them all as the Tower falls apart. It simply crumbles to dust, blowing away in the wind until there is nothing left of it. Through the dust motes, sunlight shines down on the Village once again.

The villagers begin to rebuild the Village, starting with the Cathedral. The Architect and the Maiden are indebted to the runners, and the Architect wishes he could give them something. But alas, he laments, he has no wealth or finery to reward their efforts. He suggests that perhaps he could build something for them to show his appreciation.

An astute runner should suggest he build them a bird cage. When they give him Lancelot's sword from **By the Sword** (or ask him to use the Architect's sword) and the bone for the perch from **A Fistful of Karma** (wood can also be found to substitute), he creates a simple bird cage. As soon as the Architect hands his completed work to the runners, the world turns inside out again as they are flung across the metaplanes.

Go to **The Songbird**, the next adventure.

THE SONGBIRD

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read this to the players as the transition out of *The Impossible Dream*:

The lines between reality and imagination blur again, sending you spinning down the dark roads between the Places. You have the cage now—how much longer can the journey be?

A new Place blazes into existence around you, a chaos of sensations coalescing into form and substance. It is night, and the cool air feels refreshing for a moment. You look around and see a town, perhaps a large village, though the architecture is unfamiliar.

Then you see the bodies. The stench hits you, doubling you over. You vomit a lifetime's worth of sustenance onto the street to mingle with the rotting flesh already there ...

HOOKS

If the players have been paying attention, they should expect this Place to be Thayla's green and pleasant valley, where they will find the Songbird. They're right, but Thayla's land is no longer green and pleasant.

They see death and horror everywhere they turn. Even the most jaded shadowrunners should be shocked by the violence and depravity the locals committed just before their deaths. Great evil has been done to the valley; dredge up every terrible image, every sin, every wanton cruelty that comes to mind and parade it for the runners. The Enemy has corrupted Thayla's land.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners have arrived in Thayla's kingdom, which is a dreadful shadow of its former self. Without the force of Thayla's own will and conviction, the Songbird could not keep the Enemy at bay. Shortly after Thayla left her realm (by metaplanar reckoning, anyway), the Enemy entered Thayla's city and corrupted it. The Enemy drove the people to madness and depravity, forcing them to perform vile acts upon themselves, each other, their loved ones, and anyone and anything they could find before dying in mid-atrocity. Their bodies litter the streets, preserved by the Enemy in eternal putrefaction.

This adventure includes no map of Thayla's city. Instead, the gamemaster should use his own hometown, or a city or town close to home that the players know. By using the basic physical layout of the town but changing such things as architectural styles, specific buildings, and so on, the gamemaster creates a symbolic equivalent of the familiar town in a fairy-tale realm. Place Thayla's palace in the city center, or wherever the true heart of the town is located. Make the locale familiar to the players in a disquieting way without actually revealing the source of the layout. Let the runners wander the city for a few hours; let them discover for themselves just how much the Enemy has destroyed.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS

The runners appear on this metaplane with all of their usual equipment and abilities intact. Note, however, that any spirits summoned here are automatically toxic and hostile to the summoner. See p. 100, **Grimoire II**, for more information on toxic spirits.

COMES THE DAWN

When the sun finally rises over the devastated town, the runners hear singing—a beautiful, uplifting song welcoming the sun and the new day. As they listen, the air warms with the sunlight, and the stench of rotting corpses intensifies. The runners can easily follow the singing, but it stops before they can track it to its source. By the time it stops, however, they can see the tall ramparts of the fairy-tale palace that stands in the center of town. The Songbird is inside, and the runners should have enough sense to head for the palace. If they do not, the bird sings again the next morning, and they can then follow the sound to its source.

THE PALACE

The palace shows signs of having burned at some point; at least a quarter of the building is charred rubble. A single copper and gold tower rises from part of the debris, and within this impressive remnant of the palace lives the Songbird. The runners should guess that the Songbird is in the tower; if not, the bird sings again the next morning and the runners can follow the sound. If they wander through the palace's ruined sections, the journey takes them most of the day and they find nothing except more bodies, more horror, and more misery.

Regardless of whether the runners head directly for the tower or wait another day, they encounter the four guardians described below.

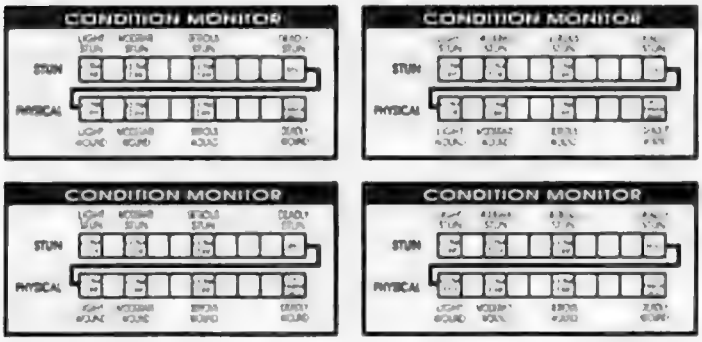
Guardians (4)

These four creatures resemble humans with long, narrow skulls and rows of pointed coppery teeth. Their skin is a leathery hide that oozes blood and pus from small, unhealed wounds. The guardians defend the palace and the tower

against all comers, attacking on sight. Though they scream and chitter as they attack, they are deaf, which should give the runners an initial advantage over them.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
6	8	6	2	2	6	6	5	6/6

Initiative: 5 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Skills: Armed Combat 6, Unarmed Combat 6
Gear: Pain Whips (+2 Reach, 8M; with each strike, they flash with a burst of energy)
Disadvantages: Reduced Senses (Hearing, Deaf), Vulnerability (Architect's sword)



With their gear and abilities intact, the runners should not find the creatures difficult to defeat. Once the fight breaks out, however, thousands of ravens or other dark-colored birds burst from the ruins of the palace and wheel into the sky, soaring higher and higher until they vanish. After the ravens depart, silence reigns in the valley.

FINDING THE SONGBIRD

Eventually, the runners begin to climb the thousands of steps that wind around the inner wall of the tower. They periodically pass corpses locked in battle or some form of violent affection. As they near the tower's summit, the runners encounter ravens pecking at the bodies, paying particular attention to the eyes and tongues.

Finally, the runners emerge in a vast, circular room with four large openings at each of the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west). A wide balcony runs around the outside of the tower and can be reached through the openings. The floor of the room is inlaid white marble veined with red and gold, the walls black marble laced with silver and gray. Covering the ceiling is a fine, detailed painting showing a cloud-filled sky and a blazing sun. Around the edge of the painting are a series of unrecognizable symbols that could be astrological signs or purely decorative designs.

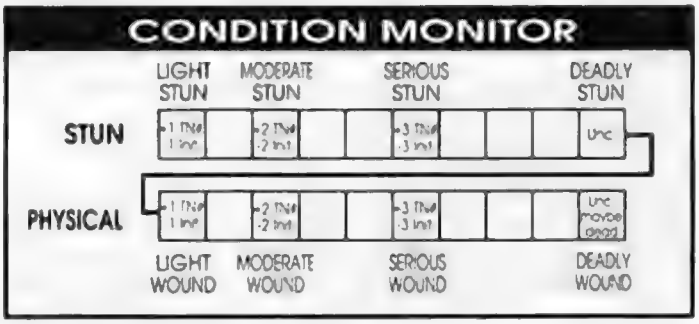
At the center of the room, a wooden bird cage hangs from a golden chain. A beautiful black-and-white songbird stares at the runners with intelligent, impassioned, sorrowing eyes. The cage is easy to open, and the Songbird is more than willing to exchange it for the one the runners are carrying. The runners must cover the Songbird's head with the hood before putting the bird in the cage.

Also in the room with the Songbird is the Warden. He stands 3 meters tall with dark hair, swarthy skin, ebony eyes, and a soulless laugh. He resembles Oscuro from **Aftermath**, Trey from **A Fistful of Karma**, and the Foreman from **The Impossible Dream**. He wields a long, thin-bladed sword that drips steaming blood on the ground.

Warden

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
10	8	8	3	6	7	6	6	0/0

Initiative: 6 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 7/4
Skills: Armed Combat 8, Unarmed Combat 6
Gear: Sword (+1 Reach, 12D damage; split any boxes of damage evenly between Physical and Stun damage, with the excess going to Stun)
Powers: Regeneration
Weaknesses: Reduced Senses (Hearing, Deaf), Vulnerability (Architect's sword)



As the runners enter the circular chamber, the Warden speaks to them:

"So lovely, so fine! Kill it for me and I will give you this town. Strangle it, snap its neck, drown it, eat it, I care not. Make it be quiet. Make it dead and I will give you joys unspoken and powers unforetold. Destroy it and I will raise you high in my council."

The Warden is deaf. He cannot lip-read and is totally illiterate. The runners have no way to communicate with him. The runners may allow him to finish his speech, or may ignore him and take the Songbird. The Warden cannot kill the Songbird or even bear to look at it. As soon as the Warden realizes that the runners intend to take the bird alive, the runners must either defeat him or hold him at bay long enough to exit with the Songbird through the doorway that supposedly leads back down the stairs. When the runners pass through this doorway, they are wrenched through the metaplanes once again and returned to the Bridge.

Go to **The Bridge, Part Two,** the next adventure.

DEBUGGING

Because this chapter is relatively straightforward and simple, little can go wrong. Despite the horror of the surroundings, the players should find it a somewhat welcome respite from the bewildering complexity of previous adventures.

THE BRIDGE, PART TWO

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following to the players as the transition from *The Songbird*:

The dark stairway leads you not out into Thayla's city as you expected, but on to the outcropping of rock that juts over the Chasm. As you step from the chalk doorway Harlequin drew (days ago, it seems), the heat and wind and the smell of blood assault you.

A fight has taken place since you left, a battle even greater than the titanic one you fled. Hunks of flesh that once might have been intact bodies lie scattered across the broken ground; around them you see the signs of fiery blasts, lightning, and other strange energies. One of the bodies—it might have had wings once—still burns with greenish-blue flames.

Harlequin stands near the edge of the outcropping, staring at the Bridge. It has obviously grown in size, though you cannot truthfully say it seems any closer to your side of the Chasm. The elf turns as you approach; he looks battered and worn. His left arm is in a crude sling, though he seems able to move it freely. Frosty rushes up to examine him, but he brushes her off as a child might an overprotective mother.

"So," he says wearily, eyeing the cage and the Songbird. "You succeeded. Tell me what happened."

Once Harlequin has set up the ritual and the Songbird begins to sing, read the following to the players:

The bird eyes Harlequin silently for a moment and then turns to look across the Chasm. It ruffles its feathers for a moment and begins to sing.

Its voice is purer, clearer, sweeter than any music you have ever heard before. The sound of it washes away all the pent-up anger, frustration, hatred, and despair you have all built up throughout your lives. Even the toughest, coldest, and hardest of you can scarcely keep from falling to pieces. Jane Foster drops to her knees, sobbing. Harlequin stares at the bird while tears of pain or joy, or perhaps both, stream down his face. He looks out over the Chasm, too, watching the Bridge.

On the other side of the Chasm, the frenetic activity of the creatures slows and then stops as they listen.

After a moment, the creatures go back to work.

Harlequin screams in rage and falls to the ground. He huddles there, looking away from the Chasm, and does not speak until one of you approaches him. "You were right," he says. "Thayla's city fell because her voice alone was not strong enough to keep them at bay." He looks up at you. "We're going to have to find her. We must find Thayla and bring her here."

HOOKS

Unless observant runners make the connection between the fate of Thayla's city and what Harlequin expects to happen when the Songbird sings on the outcropping, the players may think this encounter is the end of the adventure. Allow whatever emotions the runners and players are feeling to dominate; raise their expectations of success as Harlequin prepares the Songbird's ritual. When the singing fails to work, let the runners wallow for awhile in despair and defeat before reminding them that their world can still be saved.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Harlequin has had a difficult time in the runners' absence. He tells the runners that creatures of the Enemy, though few that actually are the Enemy, have attacked the outcropping repeatedly. Harlequin fears that they know of his plan, which puts the entire operation at risk.

Harlequin listens to the runners' story of their adventures, presumably including a description of conditions in Thayla's land; the gamemaster should have Harlequin base his analysis of the events only on what the runners say. If any of them comments on Harlequin's and Thayla's symbolic presence in most of the Places, as well as the repeated presence of an opponent in each Place, Harlequin avoids elaborating on his own involvement but surmises that the "dark figure" represents the opposition. He does not know if this opponent is a composite figure or a single person opposing them on behalf of the Enemy. He also does not interpret any of the events of the previous adventures, leaving the player characters to do that themselves. He appears troubled if any of the runners point out that in three of the four Places they visited, the Harlequin figure had some sort of relationship with the Thayla figure. If pressed, Harlequin dismisses this apparent link as "typical metaphoric image-role confusion" and refuses all further comment.

Once the runners have told their tale, Harlequin takes the caged Songbird to the edge of the outcropping. The runners see that he has prepared a ritual circle 6 meters in diameter, though the magicians (if any) among the player characters do not recognize the circle's symbology or its purpose. Harlequin places the cage in the center of the circle and then, staying within the circle, opens the cage and removes the bird. The Songbird sits on Harlequin's finger, gazing intently at his face. He avoids its eyes.

Harlequin places the Songbird on top of the cage and slowly backs out of the circle. The bird continues to watch him.

Finally, the elf reaches out his right hand, holds it with the palm facing the ground, and says something in a language the runners have never heard before. At this point, the gamemaster should read aloud the second section under **Tell It to Them Straight** (p. 122).

FOLLOW THAT BIRD

Once it becomes evident that the bird alone cannot stop the creatures, Harlequin stands, brushes himself off and address the runners:

"I had hoped this would not be necessary, because it may mean confronting the Enemy on his own ground. However, it appears we must find Thayla and reunite her with her voice. I believe the Songbird can find her if we set it on the path." He gestures, and a series of silver cords appears that connect the Songbird and the runners. The bird looks surprised and stops singing. It resumes watching Harlequin.

"The bird can take you to Thayla," Harlequin continues, "but the rest is up to you."

He walks over to the ritual circle, dispels its magic, and picks the Songbird up on his finger while muttering something to it. The bird chirps in reply. He carries it back toward the chalk doorway, gesturing the runners to follow.

Once they all gather around the chalk door, Harlequin says: "The cords I have woven will pull you after the bird no matter where it leads. Once you arrive where Thayla is, the cords will keep the bird tied to you even though you might not see it. The Songbird will go to its mistress as soon as you find her." He extends his hand and the bird toward the chalk doorway. The bird leaps into the air and disappears through the opening.

"Quickly!" Harlequin yells. "Don't let it get too far ahead of you!"

Once the runners enter the doorway, go to **The Masquerade**, p. 124.

DEBUGGING

Little can go wrong in this adventure unless the runners refuse to search for Thayla. If the runners do not agree to continue the quest, they find themselves awake and shivering in their beds. For more information, see **Picking Up the Pieces**, p. 145.

THE MASQUERADE

"And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

—Edgar Allan Poe, *The Masque of the Red Death*

OVERVIEW

Following the Songbird, the runners go in search of Thayla. They arrive at a strange mansion where a masquerade ball is being held, with some very odd guests in attendance (many of whom seem familiar). The ball's host, Lord Umberley, makes his final gambit to stop the runners' astral quest. When one of the guests is mysteriously murdered during a seance, the player characters must prove their own innocence and track down the real killer—the dark warrior, who fell in love with Thayla and will do anything to keep her by his side.

BACKGROUND

This part of the shadowrunners' astral quest takes place in a neo-Victorian setting, complete with landed aristocrats, wealth, status, and propriety. Magic exists in plenty and is taken as a matter of course, but technology is not much more advanced than in the real-world nineteenth century. The only exception is the Engine, a techno-magical computer system located deep inside Lord Umberley's mansion.

The runners arrive at a masquerade ball hosted by Lord Umberley, this Place's manifestation of their nemesis, Darke. Lord Umberley is a suave, cultured nobleman with a dark secret. His brother, Nacht, is a twisted and depraved creature that the family hides away in shame. Though locked away from the sight of others for most of his life, Nacht chanced to see and fall in love with a beautiful mute girl from an adjoining estate. Lord Umberley arranged with the girl's alcoholic uncle to fake her death so that she might become Nacht's lifelong companion. The girl's name is Thayla, and Nacht is a manifestation of the dark warrior who came so long ago to Thayla's land.

DALY

The runners must find Thayla and convince her to return with them. First, however, they must deal with Umberley and Nacht. Umberley will go to any lengths to hide his family's secret, and Nacht will kill anyone who threatens to take Thayla from him.

RULE MODIFICATIONS

The Place in which this adventure occurs requires the following modifications of standard **Shadowrun** rules. The gamemaster should not immediately inform the players of these changes; instead allow them to discover the new rules as they go along. Keep in mind that as far as the denizens of this metaplane are concerned, the way things work here is perfectly normal. A player character who attempts to do or talk about something that is not possible or does not exist in this setting will likely draw strange looks and comments from bystanders.

Attributes and Skills

The runners' base Attributes and skills do not change in this Place.

Appearance

For the most part, the runners retain their normal appearance on this metaplane. Any visible cyberware such as chrome cyberlimbs or glowing eyes is replaced by the character's unaltered appearance (for more information, see **Cyberware**, below). The runners wear clothing suitable for attending a nineteenth-century social function: suits for gentlemen, long gowns for ladies. Though the runners will soon exchange this clothing for masquerade costumes (see **The Masque**, p. 132, for details), the gamemaster should describe in detail each character's outfit in order to make the experience of the metaplane seem more real.

Cyberware

Cyberware as such does not exist in this setting, and so the runners appear without their metal enhancements. Some cyberware, however, becomes magical amulets, talismans, and the like that provide the same bonuses as cyberware—wired reflexes become an Amulet of Swiftness, dermal armor becomes a Ring of Woodskin, and so on. Cyberware such as datajacks and cranial cyberdecks that has purely technological effects and/or involves concepts unknown in this setting, simply does not exist here. The player characters lose any benefits conferred by that hardware.

Magic

All magic, including sorcery, foci, and adept powers, functions normally inside the mansion. Every wall of the house has the equivalent of a Force 6 ward. If the runners ask about the wards, they are told that the wards exist to ensure privacy because magical ability is very common among the guests. In truth, Darke wants to keep outside help from reaching the runners and so has hardened this Place against other astral influences. Spirits such as nature spirits, elementals, and watchers cannot be summoned within the mansion's confines. Ally spirits can accompany characters into the mansion, but the runners cannot summon allies once they have entered the house.

Also note that almost everyone in the mansion (with the exception of the servants, who are little more than symbolic constructs) has substantial magical protections and abilities that may take the form of Sorcery Skill or magical talismans (or both). Under these circumstances, showy displays of magic are not likely to get the player characters very far.

Weapons and Armor

Like cyberware, most modern weapons do not exist in this Place, and so the runners' weapons translate into their nearest appropriate equivalents. As a rule of thumb, most pistols become nineteenth-century revolvers (5M damage). Heavier weapons such as rifles, grenades, and automatic weapons simply do not exist. Most melee weapons translate into their Victorian-era equivalents, though such high-tech items as monofilament whips do not appear at all. Cyberweapons translate into the most similar melee weapon; for example, hand razors become a concealed knife. Weapon foci retain their normal appearance and abilities.

The runners' dress has no armor value except for heavy leather clothing worn only by unsavory, lower-class types, which has Impact Armor Rating 1. The runners must be especially careful in combat, because they can no longer rely on the damage-absorbing capabilities of their armor to protect them.

The Matrix

No Matrix as the runners know it exists in this setting, but the mansion does have a kind of magical/mechanical computer system known as the "Engine." Decker player characters can access the Engine in much the same way as a standard computer system, and may gain important information from its "memory banks." For more details on running the Engine, see **In the Gears**, p. 127.

Cyberdecks transform into a satchel, suitcase, or carpetbag containing a heavy gauntlet and a helmet similar to the fishbowl-like affairs on ancient diving suits. Both of these components are connected to heavy cables that terminate in multipronged plugs. These implements form the interface for the Engine's "magic lantern," a techno-magical virtual reality projection system that allows access to the Engine in a manner similar to the Matrix.

Scorpius, a street-smart cybermage, approaches the mansion with the rest of his team. As he draws nearer to the house, the rules of this Place transform his appearance. Instead of a grungy mage off the streets of the sprawl, Scorpius looks like a gentleman fallen on hard times. He wears fine but worn formal evening clothes. His cyberware disappears; his boosted reflexes and skillwires become Amulets of Swiftness and Skill and his hand razors become a concealed folding knife. His trusty armored jacket becomes a smoking jacket (with considerably less armor value) and his HK-227 simply vanishes. His scorpion-shaped power focus remains unchanged.

IN THE GEARS

At some point during the adventure, the runners are likely to explore the mansion's Engine in hopes of learning more about their situation. The Engine is a techno-magical analog to a computer system, made up of countless delicate mechanical parts and gears (similar to the ancient mechanical computers of the late nineteenth century) and augmented with arcane magics that permit the Engine to project data and images in a "magic lantern" show similar to an old-style virtual reality rig (old style by 2055 standards, anyway). The physical Engine lies buried beneath the mansion. The runners can access the system in the house in one of two ways: through terminals scattered through the mansion or through the "magic lantern." The terminals are glass boxes similar to modern screen-and-keyboard terminals, and they function in the same way. The magic lantern is a virtual-reality connection that uses a diving-bell helmet and a control glove connected by cables to a terminal. Deckers find the whole setup incredibly awkward and archaic, but functional. By using their Computer Skills and the strange equipment, deckers can run the Engine and attempt to get information from it as they would any other computer system.

Use a decker character's normal statistics when he or she attempts to access the Engine. The virtual reality of the Engine appears as a vast collection of interlocking gears, cogs, springs and pistons; it looks like the physical machine, only more so. Treat accessing the Engine as a mini-astral quest (see p. 95, **Grimoire II**) using Computer and other technological skills to overcome the Engine's defenses. If the decker reaches the Citadel, he or she has successfully accessed the heart of the machine and gets whatever information he requests.

A decker who accesses the Engine for information can learn any one fact contained in the story of the Place for each attempt. The Engine does not have information on this adventure's "true" events. For example, a decker can learn that Lord Umberley arranged to fake Thayla's death, but cannot learn that Nacht is the dark warrior or the details of Darke's plans, because the latter information is not part of the Place's story.

THE MANSION

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following as the transition from *The Bridge, Part Two*:

You follow the Songbird down one of the many twisting paths of the netherworld. The sky grows darker as you progress, the air thickening with moisture until you can barely make out the shape of the bird flying ahead of you. The wind picks up until it reaches a high, keening moan. Thunder cracks overhead and a cold hard rain begins to fall, soaking you to the bone and leaving you thoroughly chilled. Suddenly, a blinding flash of lightning silhouettes a dark shape ahead. As the boom of thunder rolls into the distance, you look around and realize that the Songbird has vanished. You peer vainly through the darkness and driving rain in search of your guide, but can see nothing.

Lightning flashes again, illuminating the outline of a hulking mansion atop a small rise ahead. Even over the thunder and rain, you can hear faint music that sounds like the melody of the Songbird.

As you approach the looming mansion, the faint glow of lights through the curtained windows show you spouts of rainwater pouring off the eaves and off the strange, sculpted figures that seem to leer at you from the edges and corners of the stonework. The heavy wooden doors support brass knockers shaped like grinning gargoyles. A dull, booming echo sounds as you pound one knocker against the door.

A few moments later, the door opens to reveal a tall, thin man in formal butler's attire. He motions for you to enter. "Welcome to Umberley Manor," he says. "I am Stokes. You are just in time for the festivities."

When the player characters enter the mansion, read the following:

You step into the mansion's vast, vaulted hall. Light instrumental music echoes off the high ceiling from somewhere behind one of several doors; the tune sounds hauntingly, almost mockingly, like the music of the Songbird. Alternating squares of white and black marble cover the floor, each shot through with veins of the opposite color and laid out like a giant chessboard. Rich wood paneling covers the walls, and soft light fills the room from a crystal chandelier overhead. The light appears to flicker slightly, and you realize it comes from candles rather than bulbs. A wide, carpeted staircase rises to either side of you, meeting in a broad balcony above. Several other doors lead out of the hall. Through one of them comes a man clad in a dark formal jacket and a white shirt with ruffles at the collar and cuffs. He has black hair and a neatly trimmed

beard and mustache. Smiling pleasantly, he extends his hand to you in greeting. He seems disturbingly familiar.

"How do you do?" he says, his voice warm and deep. "I am Lord Umberley, your host. I see you made it all right despite this wretched weather, eh? I'm sure you'll want a chance to dry off and refresh yourselves, so Stokes will show you to your rooms and have your costumes delivered to you there. The masquerade will begin soon. I hope to chat with you at more length then; for now, I'm afraid I must attend to several other preparations." With a nod to the butler, Lord Umberley leaves through the door from which he entered.

"This way, if you please," Stokes says, and leads you up the broad staircase to your left.

Read the following when Stokes takes them to their rooms:

Stokes leads you through the tall, narrow corridors of the house to the west wing. Taking you down one corridor, he opens a series of doors along the left side of the hall. "These are your rooms," he says. "If you need anything, please use the Engine terminals to signal me." With a bow, he turns and walks back down the corridor.

The rooms are nice; you've seen smaller apartments. Each room contains a four-poster bed, bureau, wardrobe, nightstand, and writing table, all made of dark, polished wood. Heavy tapestry curtains cover the windows; the antique wallpaper and plush carpeting remind you of something out of Sherlock Holmes. Sitting on each writing table is a strange object that looks like a cross between an old-fashioned typewriter and a computer terminal. Metal cables run from the box-thing into the wall near the baseboard.

HOOKS

The astral quest is drawing to a close. Throughout **The Masquerade**, the runners should feel unsettled and uneasy. Though the ambiance of this Place is genteel and Victorian, the kind of gracious setting in which comfort is paramount and danger seems unreal, there should be enough strangeness to make the runners feel as if they have walked into the gaping jaws of the dragon. Play with the genteel elegance of the Place and the environment of the masquerade, where things are definitely more than they seem (despite Darke's intentions otherwise).

BEHIND THE SCENES

As with the rest of the metaplanes, everything in this Place symbolizes the runners' struggle to find Thayla. Despite the symbolic nature of events, however, the environment and experiences have real effects on the player characters. After the runners pass through the darkness and reach the mansion, they become subject to the rules of this Place (see **Rule Modifications**, p. 126, for details).

This Place offers Darke, in the persona of Lord Umberley, his last chance to stop the runners from finding Thayla and to thwart their astral quest. He intends to take full advantage of this opportunity. The mansion and the masquerade are Darke's creations on the metaplane, a setting and story that he has arranged specifically to draw the runners to him via Thayla's presence. Darke believes that he can easily entrap and destroy the runners on what amounts to his home court.

Stokes and Umberley treat the player characters as Lord Umberley's invited guests in all respects. If the runners ask Stokes or Umberley any questions, they answer to the best of their ability, but neither one will break character. Any talk of astral quests, long-lived elves, or the "real world" elicits confused looks and comments about how the runner's imaginative stories will no doubt prove entertaining at the masquerade. By engaging Lord Umberley or Stokes in conversation, the runners can learn more about the nature of the Place they are in, though they must disguise their ignorance so as not to appear too out of place. Needless to say, Lord Umberley tells the runners nothing likely to help them find Thayla.

In their rooms, the player characters can talk over their situation and decide what they want to do next. No one is watching them or eavesdropping, but the runners cannot be certain of that. Play on their paranoia (hey, it's **Shadowrun**, after all).

A decker who examines the strange-looking terminal atop the writing table finds that it is connected to the house Engine. Given sufficient time and a successful Computer Theory (6) Test, a decker may figure out how this device works and use the "magic lantern" equipment that has replaced his or her cyberdeck to access the system for an admittedly strange Matrix run. If the runners investigate their rooms, a successful Perception (6) Test reveals a secret passage that runs behind the rooms, with hidden doors in each chamber. If the player characters choose to explore the passage, go to **In the Maze** (p. 130). If not, go to **The Masque** (p. 131).

DEBUGGING

If the runners attempt to avoid the mansion, they find that every path they take leads them back to the house. If they stubbornly insist on not going near the mansion, or want to look for the missing Songbird outside, have Stokes arrive in a coach to pick them up (with profuse apologies for not meeting them sooner). Player characters who refuse even this gentle reminder to get on with things fail the final part of the astral quest.

Encourage the players to play along with the story and the rules of the Place. If a runner acts belligerently or violently toward Stokes or Lord Umberley, a pair of sturdy guards sets upon the hapless runner and casts him or her bodily from the house. The runner or runners ejected remain outside until the other player characters finish this part of the astral quest. Umberley can only expel runners who refuse to follow the rules; those who play the part of polite guests are beyond his reach, at least for the moment.

If the runners fail to discover the secret passage or choose to investigate it later, they can discover it (or explore it) when they are confined to their rooms (see **House Arrest**, p. 139). If the player characters fail to find Stokes' body (which lies in the passage; see **In the Maze**, p. 130), Lord Umberley eventually "discovers" it and attempts to cast suspicion on the runners.

IN THE MAZE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The passage behind the hidden panel looks old. Its walls, floor, and ceiling are lined with gray stone; archways support the roof and several flickering lanterns give off dim illumination. Several tunnels branch off from the main passage, and additional doors open off it all along its length. You see no dust or cobwebs; someone must use this passage fairly regularly.

As you round the corner of the passage, you see a body lying on the cold stone floor. The flickering lamplight casts shadows over the face. A dark stain has spread across the body's coat and shirt, pooling on to the stone floor. You move closer and recognize the body. It's Stokes, the butler. The look on his face is one you know well from your time in the shadows; it's the look of a dead man.

HOOKS

For the player characters, the sense of mystery and danger in Umberley's mansion deepens with shocking swiftness. Mere minutes may pass between Stokes dropping the runners off at their rooms and them discovering his dead body in the maze. Such is the nature of this Place.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In this encounter the runners see the first evidence of the hidden happenings in Lord Umberley's manor. They also encounter Nacht's handiwork for the first time. The scene in the maze should serve as the beginning of a descent into fear that a hidden killer may be lurking nearby, waiting to strike at any moment. In order to play up this sense of impending doom, allow the runners to wander through the passages for a while, and feel free to improvise additional scenes and encounters with the mansion's inhabitants to unnerve the players before they discover Stokes' corpse. Stokes has been brutally murdered by Nacht, Lord Umberley's twisted brother.

A cursory examination of the body tells the runners that Stokes was stabbed in the chest only minutes before they found him with some kind of sharp weapon. They can find no other clues as to who or what killed him, or why: no footprints, no bloody knife, no other evidence. Play up the tension; remind the players that the murderer could very well still be nearby.

Once the player characters have a had a chance to look over the body, but before they can thoroughly investigate the area, they hear someone approaching. Lord Umberley appears a moment or two later, saying that he stopped by the characters' rooms and followed them into the hidden passage when no one responded to his knocks. He acts shocked at the sight of Stokes' body, but recovers himself sufficiently to ask that the runners keep the butler's death to themselves; he does not want to upset any of his other guests and spoil the masquerade. He assures them that the matter will be dealt with and bundles them off to their rooms to get dressed for the masquerade ball.

If asked about the hidden passages, Lord Umberley explains them away as an old feature of the mansion, "built when it was often necessary to hide one's doings. We have no need of such things now."

DEBUGGING

If the player characters choose not to explore the hidden passages, Stokes' body lies undiscovered until later, either when the runners use the passage to get out of their rooms (**House Arrest**, p. 139) or after they have been accused of Colonel Quinn's murder (**The Seance**, p. 136) and the evidence against them seems to be mounting. In the latter case, one of the servants stumbles across Stokes' body, and Lord Umberley attempts to pin Stokes' death on the runners as well.

If the runners insist on seeing something done about the murder or refuse to cooperate with Lord Umberley, his lordship agrees to call upon the Lord Constable to look into the matter. However, he does so in a manner that virtually guarantees the runners the role of prime suspects. After all, they were the last people seen with Stokes, they were found standing over the body, and he died near their rooms. Stokes' death should certainly increase the other guests' suspicions of the runners following **The Seance** (p. 136).

THE MASQUE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Just as you finish putting on your costumes and admiring the effects in the mirror, someone knocks politely on your door. A footman in a dark formal suit has come to guide you to the masquerade. He leads you through the twisting, turning halls to a broad set of wooden double doors just off the foyer, then turns and asks, "How shall I tell them to announce you?"

The footman throws open the great double doors. A liveried servant announces your entrance over the murmur of music and conversation. All eyes in the room turn toward you for a moment and then look away as you enter the strange and colorful menagerie in the grand ballroom.

The ballroom is a vaulted chamber two stories high, with a balcony running around the upper level. Tall, arched windows of stained glass pierce the walls at regular intervals along the balcony. These back-lit color displays show scenes from various mythologies and legends—Orpheus's journey to Hades, the death of the Norse god Balder at the hands of his blind brother, and similar images. The dance floor uses the same chessboard pattern of black and white marble that you saw in the foyer. Off to one side of the ballroom stand several long trestle tables laden with all kinds of delicacies.

On a low raised platform in a corner of the room a string quartet plays lively classical music, an impressive feat considering that they are all dressed as big furry animals wearing formal suits. You watch the ferret, the hedgehog, the fox, and the rabbit work their way through the final strains of a complex waltz.

On the dance floor, near the tables, and strolling along the balconies above is a stranger collection of party guests than you can remember ever seeing, even on some of the wilder nights at Club Penumbra. People are dressed in costumes of every imaginable kind: animals and fantastic beasts that all appear disturbingly lifelike, famous people from every period of history and many different cultures, and costumes that you're sure sprang from no mind born on Earth. The guests mingle and dance and eat and laugh and seem to be having a grand old time.

Emerging from a small knot of people near one of the buffet tables, a man approaches your group. He wears an immaculate dark-red suit. His skin has a ruddy cast, and a pair of small horns sprouting from his forehead accentuate his neatly trimmed dark hair and beard. You recognize him as your host, Lord Umberley. He smiles pleasantly and makes a sweeping bow, catching Frosty's hand in his own and kissing the back of it gently.

"You're looking lovely, my dear," he says with a sly smile. "Tell me, have you ever had an opportunity to dance with the Devil?"

Jane smiles back. "Once or twice," she replies coyly.

"Then you should know the steps well." Umberley catches her up in his arms and sweeps her out on to the dance floor just as the animal quartet begins another waltz.

HOOKS

Welcome to Surreal City. The masquerade ball seems normal enough at first, even if some of the costumes are a little outrageous. As the runners begin to mingle with the other guests, their perception of events should change. Many of the guests are more than they seem; in fact, their exact nature seems to change occasionally. Their comments, observations, even their manners imply that they are greater beings than they appear (perhaps their costumes are less symbolic than the runners think ...). By the end of the masque, the runners should have the distinct impression that certain Powers have gathered at the mansion to watch the final act of the astral quest play itself out.

BEHIND THE SCENES

At the moment, Lord Umberley is toying with the runners. He has them trapped in his domain and is willing to wait for the best opportunity to eliminate them from the playing field once and for all. Indeed, all he really needs to do is delay Harlequin's agents long enough so that any effort they make will come too late.

During the masque, the player characters have an opportunity to meet his lordship's guests. The gamemaster should use the guests described in **Meeting the Guests**, p. 132, as a jumping-off point for party guests with whom the player characters may interact, but need not limit the guests to the personalities described in that section. The runners may meet and talk to virtually anyone the gamemaster can imagine. They might meet people from their pasts (especially dead people who might have something left to say), figures from the present, or even foreshadowings of people who will figure prominently in events to come. Everyone the runners encounter at the masque is dressed in a costume appropriate for that individual's nature, and the person's choice of costume might provide the runners with valuable clues about that person's inner being.

PLAYER CHARACTER COSTUMES

Upon arrival in their rooms, or when they return from exploring the hidden passages, the player characters find masquerade costumes laid out for them by some of Umberley's unseen servants. (If they choose not to explore the passages, they find the costumes in a wardrobe or hanging on the back of a door.) In keeping with the nature of this metaplane, all the costumes somehow reflect the wearer's inner being. The gamemaster should base these costumes on the information provided by the players in **Foreshadows**, p. 14, though he need not stick exclusively to that information.

As an example, an idealistic character (there are some of those left, aren't there?) who sees shadowrunning as a means to right wrongs might receive a superhero or knight costume. A shaman might dress as his totem. The metaplanar environment makes the costumes capable of causing dramatic changes in the player characters' appearances; donning a lion costume, for example, may actually transform the wearer into a lion for all intents and purposes (though the character retains normal consciousness and the ability to communicate, of course).

Jane Foster's costume is an elaborate gown of a style that seems familiar to the runners even though none of them have ever seen its like before. The gown's deep greens and forest shades contrast beautifully with Frosty's pale hair and complexion. She takes an almost girlish delight in the outfit and changes into it at once.

Invest as much significance and symbolism as possible into the image and identity that the costumes provide each character. For example, the other guests at the masquerade will refer to the player characters by names based on who or what they appear to be rather than who they really are, and will expect the runners to show them the same courtesy.

MEETING THE GUESTS

After a waltz or two, Jane and Lord Umberley rejoin the runners, and his lordship introduces his honored guests to the rest of the party. This social round provides the perfect opportunity for the player characters to meet any other guests the gamemaster wants them to get to know. Umberley makes a point of introducing the player characters to two of his guests: the Lord Constable and Colonel Quinn. The Lord Constable is a tall, thin man dressed like a French aristocrat from the late seventeenth century. Player characters who have met Ehran the Scribe will recognize him as the Lord Constable. He is accompanied by a striking woman in seventeenth-century Castilian dress, whom Umberley introduces as Lady Nasir. Players who participated in the events of the first **Harlequin** adventure will recognize her as Ariel Nasir, a free air elemental and agent of Ehran.

Lord Umberley speaks of Colonel Quinn as an "old friend" of his. The colonel is tall and slender, with narrow features and dark hair brushed back from a high forehead. He appears quite familiar to the runners because he is dressed as a harlequin and bears a striking resemblance to their cohort on this journey. Umberley tells the characters that the colonel has retired from his military career and that he is a guest of his lordship in the

mansion. The colonel gives the runners a tentative smile and a slight nod, but says little to them.

For the most part, the party guests think and act like spoiled aristocrats at a pretentious costume party. Occasionally, the runners may pick up a hint of something more as a guest offers a bit of sage advice or a dire warning, but it is impossible to tell if such speakers are revealing their true selves or if they are simply giving voice to drunken ramblings in the roles conferred by their costumes. The runners should remain unsure of who and what they are meeting and greeting, though they may quietly voice their suspicions to each other.

In addition to the Lord Constable and Colonel Quinn, Lord Umberley's party includes some very interesting guests, some of whom may be powerful entities in their own right. The gamemaster should feel free to include any personality or archetype that might enhance the story, including images of people from the runners' pasts (or futures), shamanic totems, and archetypal embodiments of the runners' own psyches, fears, loves, and so on. This scene gives the gamemaster a terrific opportunity to take any shaman player characters to task for past actions. (Just imagine a shaman's reaction when a being garbed as his totem wanders up to him and starts discussing the character's decisions made only in the presence of that totem. ...) All such figures should appear larger than life and very mysterious. The runners should never be certain whether the person they are speaking to is real, an avatar, neither, or both.

Some of these guests crashed Umberley's masque, and he could not deny them entrance. Odds are that many guests are manifestations of the totems and other Great Powers of the metaplanes. They are not at the mansion to hand solutions to the runners, though they can provide cryptic clues and hints that may help the runners interpret events from the other adventures in **Harlequin's Back** (or from the gamemaster's own campaign). They are on hand primarily to observe, though some of them cannot resist putting in their two cents' worth.

Possible guests are described below; feel free to add to or subtract from this list as needed for the story.

Auric

A young man with tanned skin, golden hair, blue eyes, and a bright smile, Auric is dressed like a French nobleman from the time of Louis XIV, with all of the attendant ruffles but lacking the wig and face makeup common to the time. His powerful charisma makes him almost instantly liked by those around him, and admirers and friends surround him wherever he goes. Auric has a strong speaking voice and the soul of a poet. He can be talked into reciting some of his work on occasion, and may do so at the masque to entertain the other guests. A trusting soul, Auric believes everyone should get the benefit of the doubt. Player characters who ask him about Lord Umberley discover that Auric thinks his lordship needs a greater appreciation for the arts, but that the young man respects Umberley's abilities as a speaker and politician. "I would not wish to debate him unprepared," he says.

Jack-in-the-Green

A young man clad in furs and wearing a crown of laurel and oak leaves, Jack-in-the-Green has a full goblet of wine in his hand whenever any of the runners see him, from which he drinks regularly and deeply. He acts wildly and outspokenly, his behavior bordering on rudeness. Others at the masque find him either highly entertaining or a total bore, but Jack blithely ignores all criticism directed his way. If the runners choose to talk to Jack, they find him surprisingly coherent. He willingly accepts Lord Umberley's hospitality, but makes it plain that he does not care much for his lordship. Jack tries to induce at least one runner to drink with him, and will drink his new friend under the table if given the opportunity. A runner who can keep up with Jack's carousing might well discover from Jack that Lord Umberley has "something hidden, something he holds on to as tightly as a miser does his gold."

Lady Rose

Drop-dead gorgeous, Lady Rose is tall, willowy, and fair with strawberry-blond hair worn in an elaborate braided coil at the base of her long, graceful neck. She has all the delicacy and beauty of her namesake blossom, and wears a silken gown in many shades of pink and gold that flatters the slight blush of her skin. The only thing about her that is not entirely beautiful are her eyes. A deep forest green, they seem to carry little of the warmth of her appearance. A deep and abiding pain lies hidden behind her gaze, seeping through only around the edges. Occasionally, Lady Rose dabs at her face with a silken handkerchief, wiping away a tiny drop of blood that runs down her face and neck. She behaves pleasantly toward the runners, but remains evasive and mysterious.

Luna

Luna's aristocratic features are highlighted by her pale skin and midnight-dark hair and eyes. She wears a long, soft black gown with a black silk wrap spangled with tiny white stars and a crescent pendant on a silver chain. A quiet, almost menacing presence, Luna speaks little, occasionally making cryptic comments about what is going on around her. She seems to have considerable knowledge of magic and will discuss it with anyone who cares to talk with her, sometimes dropping in on other conversations that interest her. She is haughty and reserved, especially toward men. Strong-willed women runners might see her warm a bit toward them, but most of the other women at the masquerade seem to avoid her. Perceptive characters may overhear Lady Rose refer to Luna as "witch-queen." Only under duress will Luna admit that Auric is her younger brother, though either of them defends the other fiercely if necessary.

Madame Rouge

Clad in an evening gown of scarlet silks and a matching veil, the sultry Madame Rouge embodies beauty, flirtation, and desire. She seems to know every secret thought that the runners have ever had, and coyly hints at her knowledge of their innermost desires. Her appearance and manner subtly shift as she moves through the masquerade, as if she is a mirror

reflecting the desires of those around her. A runner who is concentrating on finding Thayla may briefly mistake Madame Rouge for the woman he seeks.

Mother Mondas

A heavyset, middle-aged woman of average height, Mother Mondas wears a voluminous dress in varying shades of green. A scarf tied around her head holds her long brown hair in place. She is almost overwhelmingly friendly; she greets everyone warmly, handing out big hugs whenever possible. A wonderful listener, Mother Mondas speaks only to balance the conversation and encourage others to talk. Motherly in her attitudes and advice, she stresses forgiveness more than anything else. She is firmly convinced that everyone has a little good in them.

Old Man Coyote

A tall, thin man with long, gray braids, Coyote wears shapeless brown clothing under a gray cloak and a broad-brimmed hat over a mask that depicts the face of a coyote. He leans on a tall wooden staff entwined with vines blooming with small yellow flowers. He smiles easily and has a ready, biting wit. Coyote has an annoying tendency to respond to questions with another question that directs or leads the questioner. For example, a runner who asks Coyote if Lord Umberley can be trusted is likely to receive the following reply: "I don't know. What do you think? You seem to suggest he can't be." A runner who makes a successful Perception (4) Test realizes that Coyote seems familiar, but cannot quite place where he has seen him before.

Raven

This tall figure wears a robe of glossy black feathers with shimmering green and gold highlights. The drape of the robe creates the impression of wings when seen out of the corner of the eye. A lifelike mask of a raven's beaked head covers the figure's face. The voice behind the mask is low and rich, with an exotic accent that the listener cannot place. Neither the voice nor Raven's appearance gives any clue as to gender, though almost everyone refers to Raven as female.

Raven is a polite speaker, but cagey and guarded. Runners speaking to Raven tend to tell her more than Raven tells them in return. If the runners offer choice bits of information, Raven might return the favor. Raven is most interested in secrets of any kind. The secret need not relate in any way to the runners' current quest; it need only be juicy. It is difficult to tell if Raven likes to pry out secrets as a test of others' truthfulness or of their ability to keep things to themselves.

Ronin

A small oriental man, Ronin wears the garb of a samurai, including a pair of swords tucked into his belt. His supreme confidence and self-assurance borders on arrogance. Ronin allows no one to stand in his way or to show him disrespect; he often seems to be looking for a fight. Any runner foolish enough to take the samurai up on his offer of combat swiftly finds himself overmatched by Ronin's superior skill. The samurai does not cause any lasting harm to an opponent, but simply settles for soundly defeating him or her in public. If a runner treats Ronin with the respect he feels is due him, Ronin can be a helpful ally. He cares little for Lord Umberley and will tell any runner who approaches him properly that he believes his lordship is up to something.

Smith

Smith is a dwarf wearing jeans, workboots, and a T-shirt under a stained and scorched leather apron. A belt of tools hangs around his waist, and his hands are hard and callused. He walks with a slight limp and spends much of his time apparently examining the architecture of the mansion, the construction of the furniture, and so on. He is somewhat shy in conversation unless the subject turns to construction or building of any kind, at which point he becomes quite talkative. He eventually drifts away from any conversation not about building and falls back to examining yet another facet of the grand ballroom's construction.

FINDING THAYLA

Most runners will want to locate Thayla as soon as possible so they can complete their quest. To find Thayla, they need information, and so they may attempt to make inquiries of the various guests at the masquerade, using whatever Etiquette Skill(s) the gamemaster deems appropriate for the particular inquiry. For example, talking with Ronin or Old Man Coyote might require Etiquette (Street) Skill, while questioning Auric might require Etiquette (Media) Skill. Clever runners can even use non-Etiquette Skills; for example, a runner might slip in a few questions while engaging someone in a discussion on magic theory (Magic Theory Skill) or physical sciences (Physical Sciences Skill). As a rule of thumb, all Etiquette or other Success Tests to gain information about Thayla should be made against Target Number 6, but the gamemaster may adjust the target number if he feels the runners are having too difficult or too easy a time of it.

The gamemaster should keep track of the number of successes the runners accumulate in their various Success Tests. As they reach each number of successes listed on the Success Table below, they gain the information listed for that number of successes as well as for lower levels of success. If several runners are working the crowd, add their successes together as soon as the runners have a chance to get back together and compare notes (which may not occur until after the events in **The Seance**, p. 136).

Runners who ask Colonel Quinn about Thayla and have a total of at least 7 successes see him turn pale under his clown makeup as he tells them Thayla died of a fever some months ago. "She was a lovely girl," he says, "so kind and giving." The colonel becomes distraught and excuses himself for a moment, saying he is not feeling well. He has been drinking heavily, and so his illness should not come as a great surprise. Observant player characters see Lord Umberley speak to the colonel briefly before the colonel leaves, but they cannot overhear what either man says.

DEBUGGING

Play this scene to the nth degree. Keep the characters in the dark about the other guests' identities; let them guess all they like, but don't give them a firm answer one way or another. Drop little hints about how important Lord Umberley's guests really are, and use the masquerade setting to allow the guests to act in whatever strange manner they choose.

Runners might learn some interesting things if they talk to the right people in the right way. Advise them to play along with the setting; runners who get pushy or belligerent will get nowhere. Player characters foolish enough to start a fight or draw a weapon in the ballroom must deal with Lord Umberley's guards, who swiftly disarm and subdue them. If necessary, use the condition monitors in the back of this book for the guards. Umberley uses the character's belligerence as an excuse to have the runners confined. If this happens, skip **The Seance** (p. 136) and go directly to **House Arrest** (p. 139).

Guards

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1/4

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Gear: Dueling Sword [(Str + 2)M, +1 Reach], Revolver (Light Pistol, 5M)

ASKING ABOUT THAYLA

Successes	Information
2	"Thayla? The name sounds familiar; someone I ran into once, perhaps."
5	"Yes, I've heard the name mentioned. I believe Lord Umberley was talking to Colonel Quinn at the time."
7	"Colonel Quinn had a niece named Thayla, a pretty young woman. She was a mute, and seemed very sad. I haven't seen her for some time."
10	"I heard Thayla died of a fever not too long ago. Her uncle still mourns her, poor man. Lord Umberley seems quite sympathetic to him; they speak together quite often, but nothing seems to lift the colonel's spirits."
15	"Perhaps you should seek Thayla among the dead, for she is no longer truly among the living. But then, who of us is? Take care in your quest. After all, you only hear the stories about the heroes who succeed in rescuing the princess. For each of them, the dragon devours a dozen other poor fools."

THE SEANCE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Once the events of the masquerade have played out and at least a few of the runners have had an opportunity to compare notes, read the following:

Lord Umberley steps up onto the low stage next to the string quartet and claps his hands loudly. The music stops as all eyes in the room focus on him.

"For our entertainment," he says, his smooth voice ringing through the room, "Lady Raven has agreed to put her talents to use." With a flourish, Umberley steps down and gestures to a figure on the edge of the throng of party guests. She wears a gown apparently woven of glossy black feathers with iridescent green highlights, and a mask with the beaked face of a raven. The feathers rustle as she moves. When she speaks, the voice from behind the mask is low and rich.

"We shall hold a seance," she says, "and I will use my gifts to call a spirit from beyond to speak to us. Gather around, if you will." Raven gathers the guests in a circle on the dance floor. You end up in a chain with your teammates immediately to her left, Lord Umberley immediately to her right. She spreads her arms like great black wings, calling for all of the guests to hold hands and keep the circle strong while she communicates with the Great Beyond.

"Now, then," she says to the circle. "Whom shall we call to speak with us?"

Read the following once Colonel Quinn's body has been examined:

With Lord Umberley's permission, the Lord Constable takes charge and asks all the guests to remain calm and to stay in the ballroom. He orders guards posted at the doors, supposedly for everyone's safety, until the circumstances of Colonel Quinn's unfortunate death can be resolved. Lord Umberley's servants silently remove the body through a set of doors at the far end of the ballroom. They cover the bloodstain on the floor with a cloth. You find yourself unable to look away from the cloth, unable to forget what lies under it.

Bewildered and subdued, the guests mill about, engaging in whispered conversations. The musicians no longer play, and no one laughs. Little knots of people look carefully at those around them, wondering which of them might be a murderer or in league with Colonel Quinn's killer. As the guests realize that they are trapped in the ballroom with a murderer, the storm outside suddenly seems to rage even louder.

HOOKS

Play up the mystery and magic of the seance, pulling out all the stops. Once Colonel Quinn's body is discovered, the seance dissolves in shock and fear. Suddenly, the wonderful party has turned sinister. ...

BEHIND THE SCENES

During the seance, the runners can garner a few clues as to Thayla's whereabouts. Unfortunately, Nacht also chooses to strike again, leaving the runners in a situation that is beginning to spin out of control.

If none of the runners think to suggest Thayla as the subject of Lady Raven's ritual, Lord Umberley does so. Player characters who achieve 2 or more successes on a Perception (6) Test notice that Umberley seems particularly pleased about the idea. Colonel Quinn appears to be absent from the ballroom.

Read the following when the seance gets underway:

As the lights dim, Lady Raven warns everyone to keep the circle of hands unbroken no matter what may happen. She begins to chant in a strange, musical language that none of you recognize. The room grows chill; a sudden wind howls through the great hall, extinguishing the candles and lanterns and plunging the room into darkness. You hear Raven's voice chanting louder and louder. She calls out in the darkness, in English: "You who sleep in the eternal twilight, come to us. Grace us with your presence."

Faint shimmers of light play in the center of the circle. Raven's voice continues in a monotone, as if she is in a trance. "There is resistance," she says. "All is not as it seems. I sense sorrow and regret and great anger. I cannot reach her; a dark force stands in the way, gleaming death in its hand."

A sudden cry of terror and pain from outside the ballroom cuts off Raven's chant. A wave of fear and confusion rolls through the room; several people scramble around in the dark, attempting to restore the light. The ballroom doors burst

open and a figure stumbles in, clutching the door handle for support. The light from the foyer silhouettes him in the doorway. He takes a step forward, then slumps to the floor. The lights in the ballroom spring back to life, revealing the hilt of a dagger sticking up from the fallen body's back. Several of the guests scream; the Lord Constable and a few others rush over to the body. You draw closer as the Constable bends to examine the fallen man; you see the pale face paint and garish clothing of a clown, now streaked crimson with blood. It's Colonel Quinn.

The Constable glances up at Lord Umberley, who stands nearby. "He's dead," he says in a low voice. "Murdered."

INVESTIGATING QUINN'S MURDER

This encounter provides an opportunity for the runners to dig for clues about the murder(s) and whatever else is really going on in the mansion. The runners can go about their investigations any way they like, within certain limits imposed by the Lord Constable. He is in charge of investigating the murder and considers everyone a suspect, so the runners cannot simply move around at will and ask people all sorts of questions. Unless they keep their inquiries subtle, the Lord Constable will politely ask them to keep out of the matter and let him handle it. If they persist, he may well arrest them on suspicion of having committed the crime or for obstructing his investigation.

The following brief sections describe some of the possible avenues the runners can investigate. Feel free to come up with other possibilities as called for by the players' actions and/or ideas.

Examining the Body

Examining Colonel Quinn's body will be difficult. Runners who rush to help the dying colonel when he staggers into the ballroom have a chance to briefly look over the body if the players say that their characters are taking the opportunity to do so. Have every such character make a Perception (6) Test; depending on the successes achieved, he or she may learn the information listed on the Examining the Body table, p. 138.

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Successes	Information
1	The trail of blood leads to one of the tall bookshelves. Lying open on a nearby table is a book entitled *The Intricacies of Engine Mechanics*, a textbook on Engines and their construction.
2	There are no signs of a struggle, indicating that Colonel Quinn either knew his attacker or was caught by surprise. The only other door in the room is locked. Though the runners cannot discover this yet, this second door leads into Lord Umberley's study, and he has the only key.
3	The player characters discover that the bookcase behind the reading table conceals a secret passage that connects to the maze of passages behind the runners' rooms

After the initial confusion, Umberley orders the colonel's body moved to an anteroom. Once this happens, the runners find it much more difficult to get a gander at the corpse.

Scene of the Crime

A thin trail of blood leads from the place where Colonel Quinn fell, across the foyer, and all the way to the library on the opposite side of the mansion. Player characters who examine the library and make a successful Perception (4) Test can discover the clues provided in the table, but only if they can escape the vigilance of the Lord Constable, who tries to keep all guests confined to either the ballroom or their rooms.

Talking to Lady Raven

Player characters who ask Lady Raven about the seance can find out the following information. No test is required; instead, the gamemaster should make the players roleplay their questioning and reward them with information appropriate to the quality of their performance.

- Raven believes she briefly touched Thayla, but a dark presence came between them that radiated anger and jealousy. The presence did not want anyone coming near Thayla.
- When Raven performed the Calling, she felt a quality in Thayla's presence that made her suspect Thayla was not dead, but alive nearby and calling out through the spirit world. She has no idea why anyone would lie about Thayla's being dead.
- Though Raven called upon Thayla to speak, she received no response. Thayla seemed either unwilling or unable to speak.
- During the ritual, Raven saw Thayla within a great machine, a vast collection of gears and cogs.

EXAMINING THE BODY

Successes	Information
0	Colonel Quinn was killed by a dagger blow to his back between the ribs.
1	The colonel was stabbed from behind with a gold-hilted dagger. The attack seems to have been made by someone who knew how to wield such a weapon.
2	Quinn died of a single stab wound, most likely made by an attacker who surprised him. The attacker is probably shorter than the colonel.
3	The wound looks like it might have come from the same weapon that killed Stokes. (If the runners have not yet discovered the butler's body, they notice the similar wounds when they come across Stokes' corpse.)

Talking with the Other Guests

The rest of the guests know nothing about Quinn's murder (or Stokes'), but the runners may gather additional clues from them about the nature of the Place they are in and the threat Lord Umberley poses. If necessary, use cryptic clues and hints from the other party goers to help keep the runners on track. Player characters who think to ask will learn from all the guests that no one broke the circle during the seance. Therefore, no one in the ballroom could have murdered Colonel Quinn.

DEBUGGING

The only real problem in this encounter occurs if the runners openly oppose the Lord Constable. If so, Umberley's guards restrain them. If the runners become violent, remind them that they are in a ballroom with some *very* powerful people of unknown abilities. If they want to start something anyway, the guards eventually subdue them.

The runners may succeed in getting out of the ballroom if they act quickly enough. However, their departure looks like an admission of guilt in the eyes of all present, and Lord Umberley reinforces that impression. From that point on, they receive no aid from any of the other guests, nor can they gain the Lord Constable's aid in finding Thayla. Have the guards search the house for the runners, but they should not begin by checking the secret passages. Runners who take advantage of the maze of passages can buy a little breathing space.

Give the runners a tough time during their investigation. The Lord Constable is not going let a bunch of strangers advise him on how things should be done. He does not want any meddling, especially from people who make good murder suspects.

HOUSE ARREST

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Lord Constable steps up on the stage formerly occupied by the animal-musicians and addresses the assembled guests. "The investigation into this most disturbing matter is under way. In the meantime, I must ask all of you to return to your rooms and remain there. I will question each of you individually in due time. My apologies for the inconvenience—but I ask your cooperation so that we may swiftly resolve this unpleasantness."

A subdued murmur runs through the throng as Lord Umberley's guards escort you and everyone else out of the grand ballroom and through the halls of the mansion. All too soon, you arrive at the rooms assigned to you by his lordship. Their splendor makes you think of a gilded cage. As the guards close the doors behind you, you sit down and wonder how you can possibly find a way out of the maze of deception laid for you in this Place.

BEHIND THE SCENES

During this encounter, the Lord Constable orders all guests confined to their rooms as a temporary safety measure while he investigates the murder (or murders). While under house arrest, the runners have a chance to begin actively searching for Thayla. Lord Umberley believes he has the runners trapped in a way that will allow him to dispose of them safely and prevent them from finding Thayla. Though he is more than willing to kill the runners if an opportunity presents itself, Umberley plans to simply delay them long enough for the other aspect of himself to defile the place where Thayla must sing to stop the Enemy (see **The Bridge, Part Three,** p. 143).

While the runners are in their rooms, Lord Umberley takes the opportunity to frame them for Quinn's and Stokes' deaths. He informs the Lord Constable that he came upon Stokes' body in the secret passages and saw the runners standing over him (which may or may not be true, depending on the runners' choices earlier in this adventure). The shadowrunners have perhaps half an hour before the Lord Constable comes to their suite of rooms to question them (and most likely arrest them on suspicion of both murders). Aside from simply waiting to be arrested, the runners can either use the secret tunnels to escape and search for Thayla, or a decker character can attempt to access the Engine for more information (see **In the Gears,** p. 127).

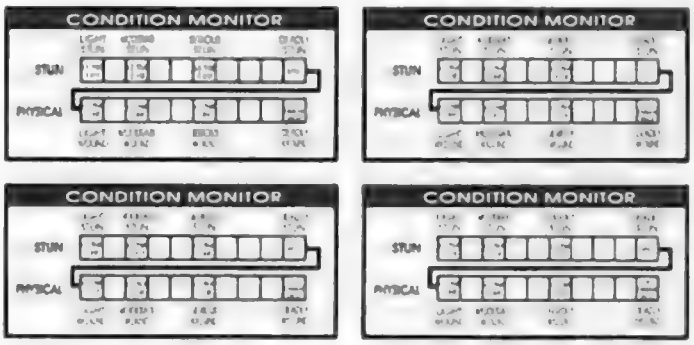
If the runners use the tunnels, the Lord Constable will find them gone when he comes to question them. Lord Umberley uses this opportunity to unleash his hounds against the player characters. The hounds are minor manifestations of the Enemy, specially trained to hunt down and kill the runners before they reach Thayla, or at least keep them from finding her until it is too late.

Hounds (4)

The hounds are huge, nightmarish, savage black mastiffs created especially to hunt down and destroy the runners.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
4	6 x 8	4	—	2/6	6	(6)	5	7S

Initiative: 5 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Powers: Enhanced Senses (Low-Light and Thermographic Vision)



The hounds track the runners through the secret passages that riddle the mansion. These passages seem to go on forever and apparently follow no architectural logic. Eventually, the runners must stand and fight the hounds if they hope to find Thayla.

In addition to the hound hunt, feel free to improvise other encounters in the tunnels. The runners' movement through the secret passages symbolizes their journey through the metaplanes to the Place where Thayla waits, and so they might well encounter all manner of challenges from their own thoughts and feelings and souls as they approach their goal. For inspiration, use the Places listed in **Metaplanes,** pp. 93–96, **Grimoire II.**

DEBUGGING

If the runners choose to sit on their hands, they find it almost impossible to convince the Lord Constable of their innocence when he finally arrives. Even if they can get him to search the tunnels and the rest of the mansion, they cannot possibly persuade him to do anything until it is too late. To succeed, they must take matters into their own hands. Remind them of how desperate the situation is and ask them how long they dare delay. Some runners may even convince themselves that Colonel Quinn's death is symbolic; for all the runners know, Harlequin may already have fallen to the Enemy.

HEART OF THE MACHINE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

When the players have wandered through the maze of tunnels for some time, read the following:

You walk through the torch-lit tunnels as they slope downward, deeper and deeper into the cool, dry darkness, following the thrumming you've been hearing for some time. Vibrations sing though the stones that line the tunnel walls, making you feel as if you are descending into the gullet of some strange creature that has swallowed you whole.

Underneath the thrumming you can now hear a metallic clicking and clattering, which sounds like the hushed chatter of great insects scuttling just out of sight through the dancing black shadows. You must be getting close to the source of the sound now. Just ahead, the corridor ends at a great bronze door etched with interlocking symbols and glyphs that form a complex maze of connections similar to a circuit diagram.

The door is cool to the touch, and swings open easily. The silence with which it opens to reveal the room behind it surprises you; as heavy as the door is, you heard only a whisper from the door's seal. As you step through, the door swings shut and latches with a mechanical click all-too-reminiscent of a gun bolt shooting back.

The room you enter looks like a mad clock maker's fantasy. Once a subterranean cavern, the chamber has been enlarged and finished by human (or perhaps other) hands into a huge vaulted cathedral of stone. Most of the available space in the vast chamber, however, is taken up by a gigantic machine. Easily the size of a building, the device is a collection of interlocking gears, motors, cogs, and pipes that move in a strange, whirling dance. Paths and catwalks lead deep into the heart of the great machine, and the lanterns that light the room cast these walkways into deep shadow. Your quest has led you here; now you must see what awaits you within.

Frag, but you wish you had a real gun. ...

Once the runners have traveled deep into the heart of the machine, read the following:

As you make your way down the corridor of machinery, the twisted maze of the Engine parts in front of you to reveal a strange room at the heart of the machine, surrounded on all sides by the massive gears and motors. Several other doors lead from the central chamber into other parts of the Engine.

The interior of the room stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Engine. Brightly lit by several lanterns containing glowing crystals, it looks cozy. Thick carpet covers the floor and several fine pieces of furniture are scattered about. Two people are in the room, both resembling creatures from a fairy tale. The first is a beautiful young woman, seated on the edge of a couch. Her eyes brim over with emotion as she looks imploringly at you; her beauty and sadness make you think of captive princesses. You know the woman must be Thayla. Her companion is hunched and ugly, dressed in dark, ragged clothing that mocks the finery worn by the guests at the masquerade. He regards you steadily, his eyes burning with hatred and anger. "Why have you come?" he shouts. "You cannot take her! She will not go with you!"

As you step toward the grotesque hunchback, another voice speaks. "Fear not, dear brother," says Lord Umberley, as he steps into the room from one of the many doors. "These ruffians will soon cease to trouble us." He turns toward you, smiling as the glowing lanterns throw his features into sharp relief. He still wears the devil costume from the masque, and his tone oozes cold menace. "I'm impressed you made it this far, but now the game is done. Turn back or die. The choice is yours."

BEHIND THE SCENES

The vast Engine room buried beneath the mansion is the setting for the final confrontation between the runners and the forces that hold Thayla captive. The monstrous Nacht built the room at the center of the Engine where the runners find him and Thayla. He has rigged all of the catwalks and paths leading to this place to collapse if anyone walks over certain parts; the collapsing sections drop the unfortunate victim into the grinding gears of the Engine, where he or she takes 8D damage. Any runner who makes a successful Perception (6) Test can spot these weakened areas.

Nacht knows every nook and cranny of the Engine and scrambles through it like a monkey. He will move silently through the shadows and make sniping attacks on the runners, trying to scare them into turning back. If these attacks do not succeed, Nacht will retreat back to Thayla's side to make his last stand.

In addition to Nacht's booby traps, the Engine has its own defenses. Strange mechanical appendages tipped with wicked blades and saw-toothed edges lash out at intruders in the innards of the machine, striking suddenly and without warning. The blades do 5L damage. To avoid being surprised by the blades, a runner must make an opposed Reaction (4) Test against the machine's Rating of 6. The appendages have Barrier Rating 5; once that Barrier Rating is reduced to 0, the appendage in question breaks.

CONFRONTING THE DARK

Lord Umberley sincerely means his threat. He gives the runners a brief time to decide whether or not to leave. If they leave, of course, they fail their quest. If they remain, Umberley and Nacht attack and attempt to kill them. Player characters who look to Thayla for help at this point see her shake her head sadly. They also remember that she cannot speak; she sacrificed her voice when she left her land, and she has lived in silence ever since.

Attempting to reason with Lord Umberley is useless. The runners can offer him nothing but their surrender. If the runners want to surrender, Jane Foster refuses to go along with such a plan. The runners will be hard pressed to convince her that they have anything to lose by pushing ahead at this point.

Lord Umberley and Nacht are quite powerful, and so the shadowrunners face a tough fight. At the height of the battle, faint singing echoes through the Engine. The Songbird flies into the room and alights in front of Thayla. Lord Umberley cries out in rage as the bird sings one final enchanting note and then lies still. Thayla turns toward the combatants, transformed. Her posture is regal and her manner commanding; at last she looks like the queen described in the legend.

"Stop!" she commands, her rich, lovely voice almost impossible to resist. Umberley seethes, while a stricken-looking Nacht stands in awe of Thayla. She demands that the fighting cease, saying that no more blood must be shed over her. Thayla refuses to go with the runners; she chose her exile for the good of her people, and she is tired of conflict and sacrifice. She does not wish to become involved in their quest, only to be left in peace.

Assuming they have survived the fight with Nacht and Umberley, the runners must now convince Thayla to help them. Ignore Charisma and other skills; talking Thayla into sacrificing herself again to help them should be a feat of roleplaying rather than lucky dice rolling. Lord Umberley argues against the runners, playing devil's advocate (literally). He points out that Thayla made her original sacrifice for nothing, and that therefore she should not bother with such futility a second time. He also uses the shadowrunners' mercenary natures against them. What can such hard-bitten, greedy mercenaries who sell themselves to the highest bidder possibly know of self-sacrifice? The runners had better be convincing if they want to counter Umberley's arguments.

If the player characters make a sufficiently impassioned and sincere plea, Thayla begins to waver. She concedes the value of their arguments and begins to consider the runners' request. Umberley becomes more forceful and less sly in his counter-argument, and Thayla begins to defy him. Finally, in a rage, he hurls a deadly spell at Thayla. He cannot allow her to live if there is any chance she will aid the runners. At the last moment, Nacht calls out Thayla's name and leaps in the path of the spell. He falls to the ground, mortally wounded, as Lord Umberley attempts to flee. The runners get a free attack against Umberley; they may pass this up and rush to Thayla and Nacht's side. (If needed, Thayla's game statistics appear in the **Master Cast of Shadows,** p. 149.)

Not even healing magic can save Nacht: Umberley's spell was too lethal. The twisted hunchback turns his face to Thayla, his breathing ragged. "My beauty," he whispers, "Only now do I leave your side. I love you." He dies, and Thayla weeps.

"Holy frag," Jane whispers. "*That* was the Enemy?"

"Yes," Thayla answers, "but he cared for me in his way. In time, I even came to care for him. Perhaps hope still exists in the world, if even one such as he can come to understand the meaning of love, and a creature of appetite can learn sacrifice. I will go with you. Nothing holds me here any longer."

DEBUGGING

The runners should not fight any pitched battles until they reach the heart of the Engine. Getting there should be a series of skirmishes, ambushes, and minor incidents. The runners catch only shadowy glimpses of Nacht and cannot take him down until they face him in the open.

A clever decker character might well think to access the Engine and attempt to override its defenses. If the character has the "magic lantern" gear with him and makes a successful Computer Theory (6) Test to find a suitable interface port, he can connect with the machine. If he does this from inside the Engine, the machine attacks the decker physically in order to stop him, and so the other runners must defend their teammate long enough for him to shut down the Engine's defensive systems.

Balance the final fight between the runners, Lord Umberley, and Nacht carefully. Though it should challenge the runners and make them sweat, it is not the heart of the encounter, so don't overplay it. Also, give the players an even break on convincing Thayla to go with them. The runners need not be great orators; a few good arguments will suffice. Don't make it too easy, but give them the benefit of the doubt if they are really trying. Make the players really think about what their characters believe; some of them may agree with Lord Umberley that heroism and self-sacrifice are a lot of jetwash!

If the runners manage to kill Lord Umberley, his "death" only ends his manifestation in this Place. The runners will find Darke ready and waiting for them when they return to the Bridge. Go to **The Bridge, Part Three** (p. 143).

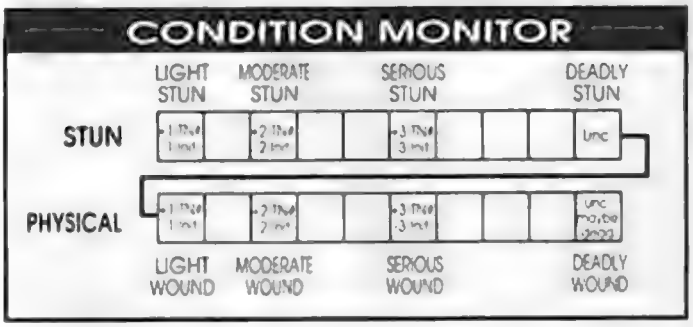
Lord Umberley

Lord Umberley is a wealthy, bored aristocrat obsessed with his own power and position. His outward charm hides a devious and twisted soul that repeatedly proves more than willing to manipulate and destroy others to maintain his personal comfort.

Umberley prefers to use magic in combat, using his power focus to provide additional defense against hostile spells. His centering ritual requires him to speak his spells in Nahuatl, the ancient language of the Aztecs. An astute player character might notice this and make certain connections with events and circumstances in the physical world. Physically, Umberley resembles Oscuro from **Aftermath,** Trey from **A Fistful of Karma,** the Foreman from **The Impossible Dream**, and the Warden from **The Songbird.**

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R	Armor
6 (12)	5	5	7	7	8	6	14	6	0/0

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 7/3
Initiate Grade: 8
Skills: Conjuring 7, Dance 4, Etiquette (Upper Class) 6, Firearms 3, Interrogation 4, Magic Theory 6, Nahuatl 5, Negotiation 5, Sorcery 7, Unarmed Combat 4
Gear: Amulet (w/Force 6 anchored armor spell that activates on command), Cane (Rating 4 Combat Spell Focus), Pistol (Light Pistol, 6M, 4 shots)
Spells: Bind 9, Confusion 8, Control Emotion 4, Decrease Strength (3) 6, Detect Enemies 4, Ignite 5, Levitate Item 7, Mana Bolt 5, Mask 4, Slay Human 8, Stunball 6

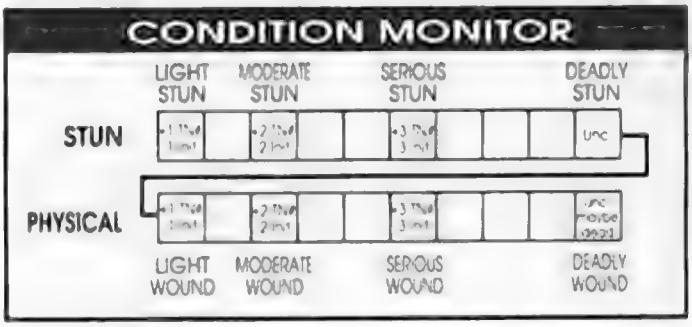


Nacht

Lord Umberley's monstrous brother inspires both pity and disgust. Though hunchbacked and twisted, he has huge, ape-like muscles and is very quick on his feet. Despite his bestial appearance and ragged clothing, Nacht is neither stupid nor foolish. He is obsessed with Thayla and flies into a rage if she is threatened. Though by nature a creature solely of appetite, Nacht has felt stirrings of true feelings for Thayla that go beyond possessiveness. Nacht bears a superficial resemblance to Sy Vants from **A Fistful of Karma.**

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
8	5	8	2	4	6	6	4	0/1

Initiative: 4 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Skills: Athletics 5, Armed Combat (Knife) 6, Stealth 7, Unarmed Combat 7
Gear: Heavy-bladed Knife (8L)



THE BRIDGE, PART THREE

OVERVIEW

In this section, the climax of **Harlequin's Back**, the runners return to the Chasm with Thayla to find that the forces of the Enemy have beaten them to the outcropping. Harlequin lies unconscious and badly wounded while Darke performs ritual sacrifices and evil blood magic on the outcropping to pollute it and make it unbearable for Thayla.

The runners have no choice but to fight and hope for a miracle.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Read the following as the transition from *The Masquerade*:

The road between the Places stretches before you again. With Thayla beside you, you travel with renewed confidence. Surely the end must be near.

As you step back on to the Bridge, you realize that something is terribly wrong. A stench you remember from Thayla's ruined city strikes you like a hammer blow. Blinking against the light, you look around and see dozens of small human figures.

The edge of the outcropping is covered in blood. A man kneels there, his hands and his black-and-tan tunic and pants also soaked in blood. Before you can react to the sight or even get your bearings, the man plunges a long, black-bladed ornamental dagger into the heart of a young boy who lies prone in front of him. The child's blood sprays into the air, catching fire as it goes. The ground ripples with the force of the ritual sacrifice as the blood magic tears into the fabric of this Place.

The man turns toward you, and you recognize him. He is Oscuro, Trey, the Foreman, the Warden from Thayla's tower, and Lord Umberley—or rather, they are him. Bathed in the flickering blood-fire, he laughs. His deep, resonant voice seems to echo throughout the Place, and the terrible figures building the Bridge laugh along with him.

To one side of your nemesis stands a large, 3-meter by 3-meter latticework of bone and stretched sinew. Harlequin hangs in it upside down, stripped and beaten nearly raw, blood slowly dripping from dozens of wounds. At the base of the frame sit a dozen or so young boys and girls, all looking limp and drugged. Like the boy you just saw killed, they wear white robes. Ten dreadful creatures near the outcropping all turn to look at you as you emerge on to the Bridge.

The man licks blood from his arm, staring at Thayla. "Kill them," he orders. "Except the girl. I have plans for her."

HOOKS

This is the big finale. Go to town with it, chummer.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Ever since this astral quest began, Darke has tracked Harlequin through the metaplanes. Incarnations of him have appeared as the villain in most of the Places the runners have visited, betraying his status as an ally of the Enemy. Darke is an amoral beast who seeks only to inflict pain and destroy life. In most senses he is no longer human, despite his human appearance.

The allies he has brought to this Place are minions of the Enemy, creatures of lesser power that Darke was able to summon across the Chasm. They fight to the death for him, without care or regard for their own existence. Darke has summoned six creatures known as crawlers and four known as toads; statistics for both appear below.

Enemy Crawlers (6)

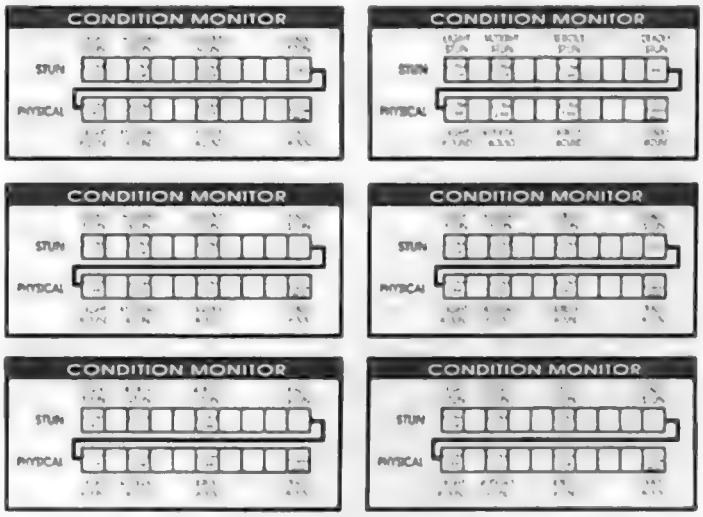
B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R	Armor
10	8 x 5	12	6	8	6	(6)	7	8/10

Initiative: 7 + 4D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Attacks: 3

Tentacle Attack (x 2): Attack Dice = 13, Melee Combat, Damage = 12M Stun

Mouth Bite/Venom (if both tentacles hit): Attack Dice = 13, Melee Combat, Damage = Every 2 net Melee Combat successes reduces victim's Reaction by 1. Successes may be offset by victim's Melee Combat successes and/or by a Damage Resistance Test (as normal). Reaction reduction wears off at the rate of 1 point per minute once the fight has ended. This damage also affects cyberware, bioware, and magical bonuses to Reaction.

Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Architect's sword)



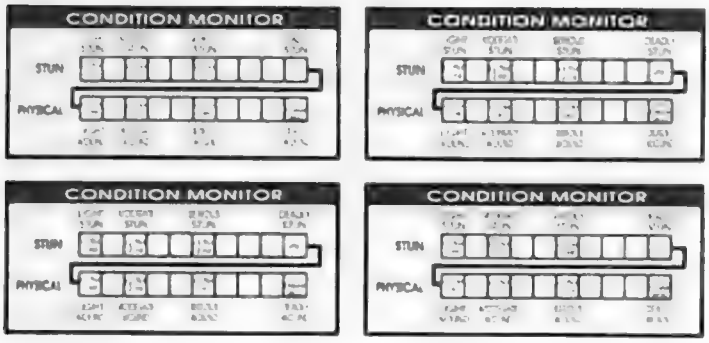
Notes: The creatures move quickly across the ground by scuttling or leaping. The distance traveled is the same for both modes of movement; leaping just looks more impressive.

Enemy Toads (4)

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R	Armor
12	3 x 2	7	4	4	2	(6)	3	3/3

Initiative: 3 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Attacks: 7M, Melee Attack Body Slam (6 dice)
Powers: Binding
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Architect's sword)

These creatures are toad-like piles of barely mobile fat that excrete a gooey, binding gel. They attack most often by body-slamming a target and binding him or her to the ground until the victim suffocates.



DEFEATING THE ENEMY

Darke continues his blood sacrifices unless the runners actively oppose him. His bloody handiwork has already raised the Background Count of the area to 3 by the time the runners arrive; every additional 2 sacrifices raises the Background Count by 1. See p. 89, **Grimoire II,** for information on how to apply background count against the player characters and in favor of Darke.

Smart runners will attack Darke first; his defeat drives the rest of his minions into cracks in the broken ground. They hide, avoiding the runners, but apparently waiting for something. Darke's game statistics appear in **Master Cast of Shadows,** p. 150. Thayla's game statistics appear in the same section on p. 149.

The player characters can cut Harlequin down from the lattice. He has been beaten to a pulp, but healing magic can bring him back to consciousness. Unfortunately, Harlequin is far too badly injured to do anything other than give the runners advice. The remaining children are also conscious, but obviously drugged. Harlequin points out that their bodies are probably drugged, resulting in a similar state in the metaplanes. The children cannot really hold conversations, but they speak the form of Spanish common in 2055 with a Mexican/Aztlan dialect. The players are free to surmise from this what they wish.

As her part in defeating the Enemy, Thayla is prepared to sing; before she does so, however, she asks the runners, "What happens when you leave?"

Thayla raises an excellent question. The Enemy knows the location of the outcropping and will undoubtedly send more forces against it once it realizes that Darke has fallen. Because Darke was human, those forces will probably come from the physical world of Earth (as the runners did), and so it will be even easier for them to find this place. Given these circumstances, Thayla wants to know what happens when the Enemy comes back and she stands all alone at the Bridge. What, she asks, is to stop them from simply killing her?

Neither Harlequin nor Jane Foster can answer her question. The player characters must figure out and offer the obvious solution—someone will have to stay behind to protect Thayla.

FINAL SACRIFICE

Thayla is prepared to sacrifice herself to protect the runners' world, but one or more of them must volunteer to do the same. Harlequin cannot force any of them to remain, nor would such a solution immediately occur to him. (He is far too self-centered.) Ideally, Thayla's troubling question should prompt the runners to make the decision to remain with the queen.

Technically, nothing is forcing them to stay. Thayla's singing alone should keep the Enemy at bay. Of course, her voice won't stop the Enemy's more mundane allies. The runners can simply leave her and hope for the best rather than risk their own lives.

If the discussion between the players threatens to drag on without a conclusion, have Thayla force the point. She says: "You must decide now. I am going to sing, and those of you who remain here when I start will never be able to leave. Go now or stay." At the conclusion of this speech, the gamemaster should give the runners one minute to make their final decisions (and depart, if they're leaving). At the end of that time, Thayla begins to sing. (If the decision to stay or go is not unanimous, Harlequin goes with the majority group and Jane Foster with the minority. Their parting is awkward, at best.)

Any runners who stay with Thayla hear her beautiful voice swell through the air, surging across the Chasm. It ripples over the Bridge, sending the creatures on it scuttling away with screams of pain and terror. The area visibly brightens and a circle of power appears around Thayla. At the edge of the circle dozens of figures appear, faint and insubstantial. Any shaman swears he or she sees his totem standing there, and any particularly religious characters see beings or forms appropriate to their faith.

The circle of power expands, engulfing the outcropping and any who remain on it in an all-encompassing warmth. The light blinds them momentarily; as it fades, they awaken back home in Seattle, in the real world and in their beds. All the runners needed to do was commit themselves to self-sacrifice for the Powers That Be to acknowledge their heroism. Any runners who leave via Harlequin's chalk doorway also awaken back in their beds, but they feel cold and alone. Go to **Picking Up the Pieces**, p. 145.

DEBUGGING

The runners either fight and win or fight and die. They either stay with Thayla or go. From a structural standpoint, little can go wrong in this encounter. Much can go wrong, however, if the runners lose the fight or choose to leave Thayla unprotected. See **Picking Up the Pieces,** p. 145.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Harlequin's Back plays like no other **Shadowrun** adventure, and it ends uniquely, too. The events build to a clear conclusion just as in any other **Shadowrun** adventure, but the player characters have no way of knowing whether any of their experiences actually occurred.

BACK FROM BEYOND

Any player characters who survive (depending on the lethality option the gamemaster chose before beginning play; see **Introduction**, p. 12) wake up safe and sound in their beds. How they wake up depends on whether or not they "died" during the adventure and when death occurred. Regardless of other circumstances, all survivors wake up on the same morning moments before sunrise, after a full night's sleep. Because they all wake up at the same time, regardless of when in the sequence of adventures they may have dropped out of the action, none of them can contact or visit any of the others before they too wake up.

IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE ...

Runners who "expire" prior to the completion of all the adventures in **Harlequin's Back** wake up abruptly at sunrise, each with a Serious Stun wound that heals normally. No other evidence exists of their having participated in any kind of astral adventure, but they remember all the events that apparently transpired up to the moment of their "death." These runners also gain the Karma Awards given in the **Awarding Karma** section, below, for each adventure they completed. No finish, no Karma.

STAY? YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN' ME ...

Runners who bow out at the conclusion of **The Bridge, Part Three** (p. 143) rather than volunteering to stay behind and guard Thayla wake up suddenly, thrashing around. For a moment, the fading shadows in their squats seem harsher, darker, more threatening than usual. As traces of daylight filter into the room, the feeling of fear passes.

For a number of days equal to 10 minus each runner's Essence or Magic (whichever is higher), they dream of the Chasm and of Thayla, of a finished Bridge and Thayla's cruel death at the hands of the Enemy. Sleep does not come easily to them, and each of them accumulates 1 box of Stun damage for every night he or she dreams. This box does not heal until the nights of dreaming end.

These runners also gain the Karma Awards outlined in the **Awarding Karma** section for the different adventures, including Karma for **The Bridge, Part Three**. Obviously, they do not gain the Karma Award for staying to guard Thayla.

FINISHING WHAT THEY STARTED

Runners who stay through the whole mess and agree to guard Thayla get the biggest reward. They wake up gently, called out of a restful night's sleep by the sound of a bird (an ordinary bird) singing somewhere outside their window. When they go to look for the bird, however, its song stops. These runners feel calm and somewhat at peace, if only for a little while.

Like the runners who chose to leave, those who stayed dream for a number of days equal to their Essence or Magic Attribute, whichever is higher. However, they dream of Thayla in all her glory standing at the edge of the Chasm between the Places and singing back the darkness.

These player characters gain all the Karma Awards described in **Awarding Karma.**

AWARDING KARMA

All things considered, this adventure can produce a gold mine of Karma. The gamemaster should feel free to limit any awards as appropriate to each individual game and group of player characters. The Team Karma Awards listed here are given for the entire adventure of **Harlequin's Back.** If he or she wishes, the gamemaster can break the awards down by adventures or events within each adventure, but that level of detail should not be necessary. Regardless of the outcome of any given adventure, the gamemaster should award individual Karma per the guidelines on p. 199, **SRII**.

THE BRIDGE, PART ONE

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 4 for getting dragged along by the plot and then for beating on a bunch of fairly tough monsters.

AFTERMATH

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 8 if the runners assisted Leroy and watched life reclaim the land. If they didn't, they get *nothing*.

A FISTFUL OF KARMA

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 8 if the runners helped Bergamot get his act together and stand up to Trey, Vants, and the Blood Eagle gang. If they didn't, they get *nothing*.

BY THE SWORD

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 10 if the runners help Lancelot to regain his honor and free the Champion of Spring. If they didn't, they get *nothing*.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 8 if the runners engineered the downfall of the Foreman and released the Maiden to help her people. The runners also get a total of 4 additional points of Team Karma for possessing the hood, the perch, and metal for the birdcage, and for asking the Architect to make the cage. If they did not aid the villagers, they get *nothing*.

THE SONGBIRD

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 2 for rescuing the Songbird. If the runners fail the rescue attempt or kill the bird as the Warden asks them to ... well, the whole adventure kinda ends right there, doesn't it? You guessed it—they get *nothing*.

THE BRIDGE, PART TWO

The Team Karma Award .Increases by one point just for being there. (Thanks for playing!)

THE MASQUERADE

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 8 for defeating Lord Umberley, rescuing Thayla, and convincing her to return to the Bridge with them. If they didn't ... well, that's really unfortunate. Once again, they get *nothing*.

THE BRIDGE, PART THREE

The Team Karma Award for this adventure is 8 for those runners participating in the events up to the point where they must decide whether or not to stay behind and protect Thayla forever. Those characters who take off get no more Team Karma. For those who stay, we suggest adding a *whopping* additional 10 percent to all *Team* Karma Awards *in any adventure* for a year and a day. Of course, the gamemaster may change this award, lessen or extend the time, or simply award flat points instead.

These characters also retain any remaining Karma given to them by Harlequin at the start of the adventure. As in the adventure, these points are gone once expended or allocated in any way.

WHAT HAPPENED?

As stated earlier, all the runners have complete and clear memories of the events in which they took part (at least, as much as the players themselves remember). However, they cannot find any location in the desert of the American Southwest that corresponds to the spot they visited at the beginning of the astral quest. If by chance the runners bump into Harlequin or Jane Foster, neither one can tell them conclusively what happened. On many levels, the quest remains as mystifying to them as to the player characters.

BUT DID WE WIN?

Aside from any disquiet or calm the runners felt upon waking, they see no signs that anything is different with their world. Everything seems to work the same, and no swarms of terrible nightmare creatures come surging out of the depths of the metaplanes. How can the runners tell who won? How can they know what actually happened? They can't ... at least not yet.

FUTURE SHOCK

We haven't yet decided if the Enemy will play a part in the ongoing story of the **Shadowrun** game. We'd like you to help us make that choice. If you'd like to express an opinion on whether or not you want to see the Enemy become a continuing element of the **Shadowrun** universe, in the novels and the game product, please send us a short letter, no more than a page or so. Let us know if your runners succeeded or wimped out at the end of the adventure, whether or not you'd like the Enemy to become a continuing story/universe element, and how extensive you want their presence to be (keeping in mind what their activity in the physical world will mean to where your runners live). Send all letters to:

FASA Corporation
1100 West Cermak, Suite B305
Chicago, IL 60608
Attn: Enemy Feedback

We won't reply to your letter, but we will read it and take note of what you want to see. Here's your chance to tell us the direction you think **Shadowrun** should be going. We look forward to hearing from you.

MASTER CAST OF SHADOWS

This section provides descriptions and statistics for the major non-player characters who appear in every adventure of **Harlequin's Back** (in one form or another).

HARLEQUIN

Oh heck, let's just say it—Harlequin is effectively immortal. He is immune to disease, pathogens, poisons, and age, and has existed for more than 7,000. (He refuses to talk about his age, considering the very question to be impolite.) Harlequin is an elf, with flowing red-brown hair that he prefers to wear pulled back in a simple ponytail tied with a leather cord. His eyes are usually green with gold flecks, though their color can change according to his moods, the weather, and the tightness of his underwear. Of average height and light build, Harlequin is in excellent physical shape.

Harlequin almost always paints his face according to the style of his namesake. At a minimum, he wears a plain diamond over one eye. His most dramatic face paint (these days) consists of full whiteface, with diamonds over both eyes and a triangle across his mouth. The colors of the makeup vary according to his moods, the weather ...

He dresses like most sprawl inhabitants, though he has had problems lately staying up to date with recent fashion. He favors a long black or brown leather coat, sometimes adorned with buttons and sometimes painted with various designs and slogans. Underneath, he wears blue jeans and loose-fitting cotton T-shirts. Anaconda-skin cowboy boots are currently his favorite footwear.

Harlequin's attitude, manner, philosophy, dress, and accent are subject to change at a moment's notice. He is quick-witted, but his wit often depends on some obscure reference that perhaps only three other people in the world understand. He is quick to anger, and equally quick to forgive ... usually. If his anger lasts, it becomes an all-consuming passion. Given a chance, he rambles and raves on almost any subject, but what he says is often fascinating and truly eye-opening. He also has an annoying enigmatic streak that most often manifests when player characters want him to give them direct answers. He believes people should hunt for the truth, not be given it; they should certainly never take anyone else's word for it.

Harlequin reveals nothing much about where he came from and what he has done with his life. He may say that he has been a poet, a warrior, a prince, a slave, a hero, a villain, and a coward, often in various combinations. Among other things, Harlequin is a powerful hermetic magician, though he understands and manipulates magic in a vastly different way

than is common in 2055. He therefore finds it difficult to teach anyone else his art, especially those raised with a modern world view like Jane Foster.

Harlequin is self-initiated to a double-digit grade, but even that statement only works for purposes of comparison because his magic functions differently. As a rule of thumb in roleplaying Harlequin, if it exists as a spell he can probably cast it (or fake it quickly) at a level no player character can hope to resist. He also possesses enough self-activating protections and wards to make him virtually invulnerable to all save those who can use magic on his level (which means slottin' near nobody).

As in the first **Harlequin** adventure, Harlequin has no game statistics because he serves primarily as a motivator for the story's events. He can do whatever the gamemaster needs him to do to move the story along, and he cannot do anything the player characters must do for themselves to make the story work. The gamemaster should treat him and others like him in the **Shadowrun** world as tools around which to write and run interesting stories. No player character should ever be able to beat Harlequin, and therefore he needs no stats. (First Axiom of roleplaying games—give it stats and someone will kill it, regardless of how tough it's supposed to be.)

Current events have left Harlequin a little shaken. The Powers That Be have asked him to reassume the hero's role he thought he'd left behind ages ago, and he's not sure he's up to it anymore.

JANE "FROSTY" FOSTER

A veteran of the orphanages of Columbia, Missouri, Jane Foster was making a life for herself as an executive secretary at CommTech, Inc., when Fate tapped her on the shoulder. Though she does not yet know it, she is the daughter of the famous elven statesman, Ehran the Scribe. She met Harlequin a few years ago when she became a pawn in a game of vengeance between Harlequin and Ehran (see the original **Harlequin** adventure). She chose to remain with Harlequin, who had discovered her latent magical talents. She has learned a great deal from him even though he is a difficult master (big surprise!), but lately she has begun to wonder if it is time to move on. The events of the Chasm and the Bridge leave her stunned—they show her aspects of the universe she'd never dreamed existed. She also sees that there is far more to the universe than Harlequin can teach her.

Jane is tall and thin with long, snow-white hair cascading down her back. She is elven, though her metatype is not obvious. Equally at home in corporate suits or biker synthleathers, Jane dresses for effect. No matter what outfit, her clothes are of the finest quality. She tends to look for one-of-a-kind items, and also favors simple but elegant jewelry. The most notable piece she wears is a platinum ring in the shape of a coiled dragon. Though the ring is heavy and ostentatious, she never takes it off.

Jane always wants to be (and frequently is) in control. She does not like surprises, and will go to great lengths to make sure she knows exactly what is going on in her world (leading to frequent, bitter confrontations with "Mr. Enigma," Harlequin). Jane's pragmatic streak often makes her come across as hard, but she can make long-lasting friendships. She is still deciding about the nature of her relationship with Harlequin. She carries her father's immortality trait, though Harlequin has not yet told her this.

Attributes

Body: 3	Willpower: 6
Quickness: 3	Essence: 6
Strength: 2	Magic: 8
Charisma: 6	Reaction: 5
Intelligence: 5	

Initiative: 5 + 1D6 (+3D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/3
Initiate Grade: 2
Powers: Immunity to Age, Disease, Pathogens, Poisons
Skills

Athletics: 3	Etiquette (Corporate): 5
Bike: 5	Magic Theory: 2
Car: 4	Sorcery: 4
Computer: 3	Unarmed Combat: 3
Conjuring: 3	

Gear
- Armor Clothing (0/3)
- Power Focus (4) (dragon ring)
- Spell Lock (Increased Reflexes +2)
- Spell Lock (Barrier 4)

Spells

Combat
- Mana Bolt: 3
- Power Bolt: 3
- Powerball: 2
- Sleep: 3

Detection
- Clairvoyance: 3
- Detect Life: 3

Health
- Heal: 4
- Increase Reflexes (+2): 2
- Treat: 4

Illusion
- Chaos: 3
- Confusion: 3
- Mask: 4

Manipulation
- Ice Sheet: 3
- Spark: 2

CONDITION MONITOR

	LIGHT STUN	MODERATE STUN	SERIOUS STUN	DEADLY STUN
STUN				
PHYSICAL				
	LIGHT WOUND	MODERATE WOUND	SERIOUS WOUND	DEADLY WOUND

THAYLA

The lost queen of a lost land, Thayla has wandered with the dark warrior as her sole companion for a very long time. By the time the runners finally find her, she has passed through more places and experiences than most could imagine and has lost much of her passion for life. The player characters must shake her out of her apathy if they are to succeed in their quest.

Thayla's formidable magical abilities are bound up in her voice, and she uses her singing as a Centering Skill. She can perform no magic until the Songbird returns her voice during **Heart of the Machine** (p. 140), the final scene of the adventure titled **The Masquerade.** In that adventure, Thayla appears in all her beauty and glory. The NPCs of Talia in **Aftermath,** Celia in **A Fistful of Karma,** the Maiden in **The Impossible Dream,** and the Songbird in **The Songbird** all resemble Thayla in ways beyond the physical.

Thayla is tall and of light to medium build. Her hair is raven black and her skin pale, with a slight blush to her cheeks. Her eyes are an impossibly brilliant, deep emerald. Her manner is poised, regal, calm, and strangely alluring despite her air of command.

Attributes

Body: 3
Quickness: 4
Strength: 2
Charisma: 8
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 16
Reaction: 4

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/2
Initiate Grade: 10
Powers: Thayla sings to assault the Enemy in the final scene (**The Bridge, Part Three,** p. 143). Each singing attack is a Complex Action and inflicts 16M damage on all entities of the Enemy in the area. The Enemy's manifestations may resist this effect by making Willpower Tests.

Skills

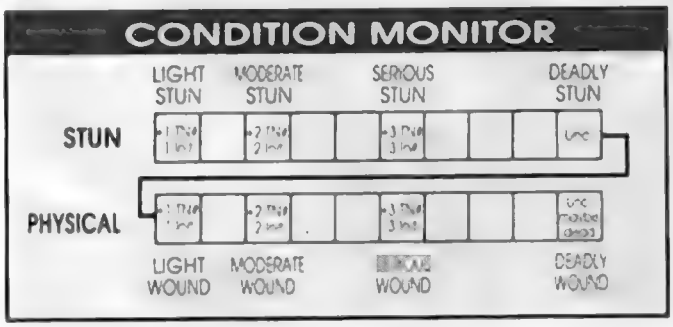
Administration: 5
Conjuring: 6
Dance: 5
Etiquette (Court): 7
Magic Theory: 6
Negotiation: 5
Singing: 12
Sorcery: 8
Storytelling: 5
Unarmed Combat: 3

Gear

Armor Clothing (0/1)

Spells

Combat
Sleep: 10
Detection
Analyze Truth: 8
Detect Enemy: 6
Health
Heal: 10
Illusion
Entertainment: 6
Manipulation
Control Emotion: 12
Light: 7
Mana Barrier: 8



DARKE

Darke is one of the mysteries of **Harlequin's Back**. A human ally of the Enemy, he is a powerful magician. All other clues to his identity are scattered through the adventure in various places. Darke is an evil man, so horrible that his presence echoes through the metaplanes and his aspects in various Places appear as both human and monster.

Not much can easily hurt Darke, but he is vulnerable to the Architect's sword (for a description of Vulnerability, see **Weaknesses of Awakened Beings**, p. 220, **SRII**). If the runners manage to kill him at the Chasm (see **The Bridge, Part Three**, p. 144), he dies in the real world. Rest assured, however, that the Enemy will find others like him.

Attributes

Body: 5	Willpower: 6
Quickness: 4	Essence: 6
Strength: 4	Magic: 8
Charisma: 3	Reaction: 5
Intelligence: 6	

Initiative: 4 + 2D6

Threat/Professional Rating: 9/4

Initiate Grade: 4

Skills

Armed Combat: 4	Sorcery: 6
Firearms: 5	Unarmed Combat: 4
Magical Theory: 4	

Gear:

Armor-lined Robe (4/2)
Generic Heavy Pistol (Heavy Pistol, 9M, 12 rounds)
Power Focus (3)
Spell Lock (Anti-Bullet Barrier 5)
Spell Lock (Increased Reflexes (+1))

Spells

Combat
Hellblast: 5
Sleep: 7

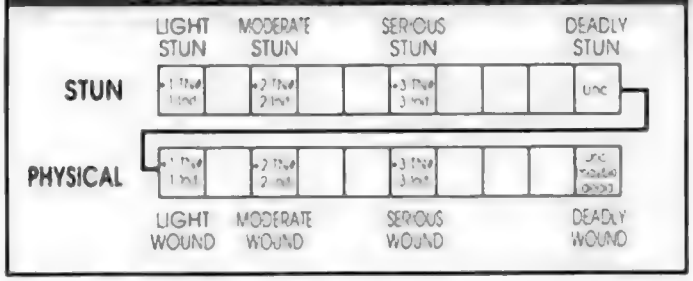
Detection
Mind Probe: 4

Health
Decrease Reaction (–2): 4
Heal: 4
Increase Reflexes (+1): 4

Manipulation
Anti-Bullet Barrier: 5
Flamethrower: 8

Illusion
Invisibility: 5
Mask: 8

CONDITION MONITOR



THAYLA'S VOICE

Ages ago, before written memory began, lived a queen of great beauty and even greater heart. Thayla reigned over a rich green valley nestled between two mountain ranges that rose like spikes into the heavens. Under her rule, the land she loved prospered, and her people lived their days in joy.

Each morning, Thayla greeted the rising sun with a Song. She sang in a voice as clear as the air and as bright as the great burning orb itself. Nothing foul or dark could prosper in her land, for her voice was too pure for such abominations to bear.

One night, an army of dark creatures made to enter the valley, seeking to overrun the prosperous land and corrupt it with their vile presence. Thayla rose that morning as she always did, and upon seeing the black army, sang. Her voice filled the valley with power and hope.

The evil horde, shown the depravity of their existence by her voice, had no choice but to flee. And as they did—running and flying with wild abandon for refuge beyond the valley—one black soldier slowed and, for the briefest of moments, listened to Thayla's Song.

Days passed, and the terrible army remained beyond the valley, fearful of the Song. Finally, driven by their dark masters, they surged forward again. And again Thayla sang.

As before, the foul creatures fell back blindly, unable to stand even a few pure notes of her voice. But again the lone, tall warrior with hair and eyes of dark fire lingered and listened, if only for a few moments, before fleeing the valley.

The next time the creatures approached Thayla's domain, less of the army came. The rest were unable to marshal the will needed to enter the valley. But again, the lone dark soldier fell back last, so that he could hear her Song.

Finally, not one of the black army would come. Not even the terrible threats of their vile masters could push them forward. But still a single warrior in ebony and red armor would slip into the valley before each dawn and listen, and after a time, watch as well.

The black figure advanced to where he could see Thayla standing high upon the terraces of the great sprawling city that surrounded her palace. And he would watch her every morning, as she rose and greeted the new day with the Song. And as he listened, blood flowed from his ears and his skin blistered from the powerful purity of her voice, but he would not turn aside. He would not flee from her Song. And so he stood, listened, and watched.

Then one night, the dark warrior slipped into the city as Thayla slept. He crept into her citadel, sat at the foot of her bed and watched her.

When she woke and found him there, she called for her guards, but none were strong enough to move the dark warrior. She called her sorcerers, but none were wise enough to banish him. She sang to drive him away, but though his body and spirit were wracked with pain, he stood strong and firm, enraptured by her beauty.

Unable to drive him away, the great Queen Thayla decided to ignore him. Though he stood at her side, she ate without speaking to him. Though he ran alongside as she took her horses out for exercise, she did not look at him. And though he stood silently nearby as she slept, she did not acknowledge his presence.

Each morning, she would rise and greet the sun, singing loud and strong so that the dark army waiting beyond the valley could not enter. And each morning, he stood beside her and cried tears of blood and fire at the pain and joy her voice gave him.

And so this went on for some time. Thayla slept, sang, and performed her royal duties. But the black warrior stayed at her side, and slowly the land began to darken from his presence. The animals of the field sickened, as did the people. The crops would not grow, and dark and terrible clouds filled the sky over the valley.

Thayla knew the black soldier was the cause of all these things, and so she asked him to leave. He did not even answer her. She tried to trick him into leaving, but he would not be fooled. Then she tried to force him away, but he could not be broken. Finally, she begged him to leave.

"But I do not wish to leave," he replied. These were the first words he had ever spoken to her, and his voice was like dried leaves blown on the autumn wind. "Your beauty is like none I have ever seen."

"But you cannot stay," she told him. "Your presence is destroying my land and my people."

"I care not for your land or its people," the warrior told her. "I care only for you."

Faced with his determination, Thayla wept. Slowly her people died. Finally, she called her greatest advisors together and told them what they must do.

"As you know, the presence of the dark warrior is destroying our land and our people," she said. "However, he will not leave my side. We cannot make him leave, and so *I* must leave the land and take him with me."

Her advisors wailed at her words. "But you cannot! It is only your voice that holds the black army at bay! If you leave, we will certainly die!"

Thayla nodded, for she knew this to be true, but said, "I will leave, but my voice will remain." And with that she charged her most powerful sorcerers with the task of placing her voice in a songbird that would greet the rising sun each morning as she had.

They searched the land and found the finest songbird of all. And as the sun rose, they performed the ritual. When the first light appeared the next morn, the bird sang with Thayla's Voice, and the Song held the dark army at bay.

The sorcerers rejoiced at this, but when they turned to congratulate Thayla, she and her dark shadow had gone. They searched the land but could find neither of them.

But the Songbird rose each morning. And with a voice as pure as the clear air itself, it sang the Song, and the black army trembled in its tracks, unable to enter the valley.

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less than 20 QUESTIONS

Another fine survey from *Prosperi Marketing Services.*

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City	State	Zip Code	System Identification Number *(If Applicable)*

1. What's your favorite color? _____

2. The last time you wore a costume for fun, what was it? _____

3. Under what circumstances, if any, would you sacrifice your life? _____

4. What's the best thing you've ever done? _____

5. What's your favorite number? _____

6. Which great figure from mythology, literature, or the media do you identify with? _____

7. What's the worst thing you've ever done? _____

8. Under what circumstances, if any, would you betray your friends? _____

9. What manner of dying do you fear most? _____

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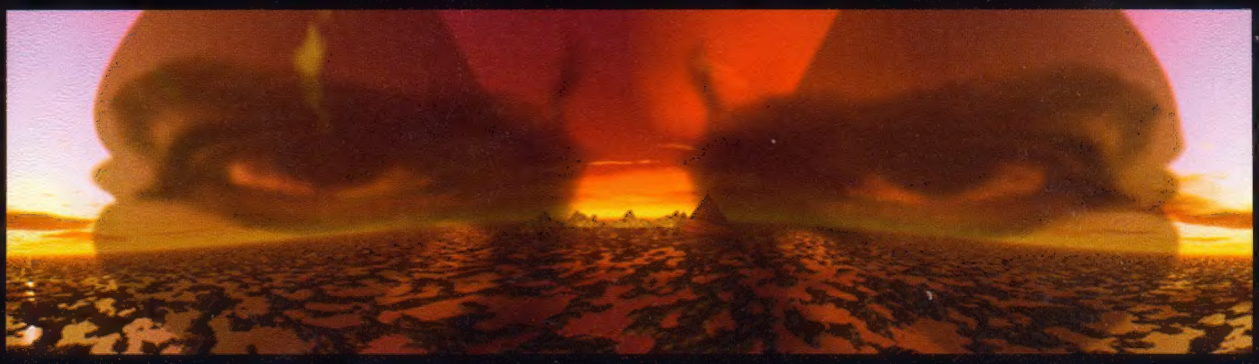
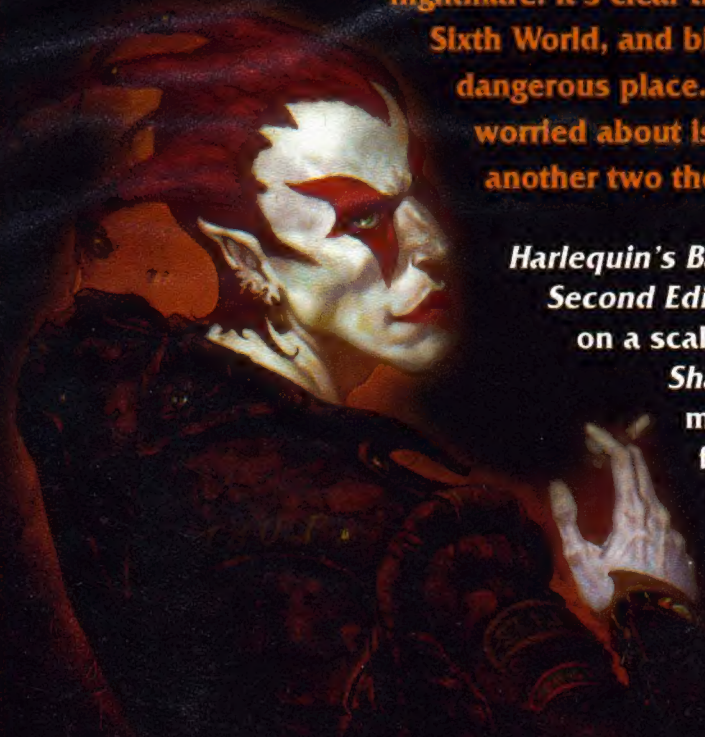
HARLEQUIN'S BACK...



...AND THE WORLD MAY NEVER BE THE SAME!

It's long been said that trouble follows Harlequin around like a loyal dog, but this time he's taking the lead and dragging some shadowrunners along on his waking nightmare. It's clear that the level of magic is rising in the Sixth World, and bigger magic makes the world a more dangerous place. But the particular danger Harlequin's worried about isn't supposed to be a problem for another two thousand years...



Harlequin's Back **is a big adventure for *Shadowrun, Second Edition*. It involves magic and mayhem on a scale beyond any previously published *Shadowrun* adventure and is recommended for veteran gamemasters and fearless players. (Experience with the first Harlequin adventure is helpful, but not required.)**

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